

The Lavant Stream at Havant, Rowlands Castle and Finchdean

Robert West, Paul Marshman and Andy Lee



The Lavant Stream wends its way to the entrance of the culvert in Eastern Road which carries it under the railway to Waterloo Road. It was a childhood adventure to crawl all the way through with the aid of a lighted candle. *Ralph Cousins*

Compiled by Ralph Cousins
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Resurfacing work in North Street in October 2016 clearly showed the route of one of the culverts running down the western side of North Street from Prince George Street to Elm Lane. Originally the Lavant Stream flowed in the open with bridges across it.



The Lavant Stream exposed in Elm Lane during the replacement of the roof of the culvert. Early 2000s.

Foreword

It is difficult to imagine when one reads of towns being flooded today that this was once a not unusual occurrence in Havant although on a somewhat smaller scale.

The Lavant Stream has flowed through town for hundreds, if not thousands of years, although its present course suggests that it has been engineered over the years and it is not on its original route.

An investigation carried out by water diviner, Laurence Booth, indicates that the stream originally flowed from Prince George Street across what is now Market Parade to the park.

Robert West has diligently researched the records of the floods which have occurred in recent centuries; one can only speculate what it must have been like before these times.

Fortunately works carried out at Havant have eliminated the problems caused by flooding, except when grills become blocked, but Rowlands Castle and Finchdean have still suffered when the lavants are up.

Paul Marshman has made a meticulous record of some of these events and Andy Lee, a member of the Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group, contributes an account of events in recent times and outlines actions which have been taken to help reduce the impact of when the lavants will, one day, surely rise again.

Ralph Cousins
January 2017

Havant's Lavant Stream

Robert West

It is not immediately obvious that there is a stream running through the middle of Havant, for much of its course is hidden in culverts and even where the channel is visible there is often no water to be seen, especially in summer. Only when it receives the copious and constant overflow from the numerous springs on the southern edge of the town does it have a permanent flow.

For this reason there is no point which can be identified as the river's true source, its location being entirely dependent upon the season of the year and the quantity of rain falling in the catchment area. In almost all winters a stream is formed from the surface run-off from the impervious Tertiary clays and Reading Beds which form a band between the silts and alluviums of the coastal plain and the chalk of the South Downs. But in wet winters there is also a flow from the saturated chalk, and in exceptional winters this can give rise to the 'Streams' that suddenly erupt and turn the normally placid or non-existent stream into a torrent which still occasionally brings flooding problems to the settlements of Finchdean and Dean Lane End and which, until the early 20th Century, periodically inundated parts of Havant.

The very highest point of rising – which occurred in the exceptionally wet winter of 2000/2001 – is in the vicinity of Woodcroft Farm about 1km east of the village of Chalton (SU738161) and some 75 metres above sea level. More usually, when the 'Lavants' do erupt, they begin in the vicinity of Idsworth Church, about 2 kilometres to the south, where a small wooden bridge taking the footpath from the Finchdean Road to the church is testimony to the fact that a flow of water is occasionally to be found here.

There is, however, another branch, sometimes known as the Wick branch because its usual (although extremely infrequent) point of rising is in the vicinity of Wick Farm (SU729136) some 50 metres above sea level. It then flows down the valley in which South Lane runs. In December 2000 however it rose much further to the north, about 1 km south-west of Chalton and some 70 metres above sea level.

The two branches meet in Finchdean village then flow south, closely

following the railway line, to Dean Lane End then through the western edge of Stansted Forest before crossing over Woodberry Lane.

Below Woodberry Lane the chalk ends and the band of Tertiary clays and Reading Beds commences. Here the Lavant Stream runs through a broad shallow valley from the slopes of which run small and intermittent streams that drain Southleigh Forest to the east and Havant Thicket to the west. By far the most substantial of these watercourses is the Durrants Stream, which rises on Gipsies Plain immediately to the west of Red Hill and flows through Durrants and under Prospect Lane to join the main course at the point where it crosses under the railway line and Whichers Gate Road. Indeed it is possible to regard the Durrants Stream as the semi-permanent headwater of the Lavant Stream, and that is certainly how it is depicted on the 1842 Tithe Map.

From here the Lavant Stream flows in a straight channel parallel to the railway on the eastern edge of the Bartons Green Recreation Ground in Wakefords Way before crossing under Bartons Road and into New Lane where the bed and banks were paved and the channel widened when the industrial estate was created in the 1950s. It is likely, however, that the river was already managed and controlled here, for the Tithe Map shows it running in a series of clearly artificial zig-zags suggesting that it may have been utilised for water meadows. Half way down New Lane the course turns west to pass under Crossland Drive where a relief pipe conveys excess floodwaters into the Hermitage Stream at Stockheath Lane.

From Crossland Drive it flows through the grounds of the old Oak Park School, now partially taken up with housing (one road has been named Lavant Drive) before passing first under Eastern Road and then the station car park and the Portsmouth to Chichester railway line.

It now enters Havant town centre where its course has been more drastically altered and engineered than anywhere else. It makes a brief appearance south of Waterloo Road, turning at right angles to the west before disappearing once again under Prince George Street and turning ninety degrees to the south to flow beneath the western side of North Street. At the top of North Street, at its junction with Prince George Street (known, until the late 19th Century as Bear Lane) it once formed a pond into which also drained a small stream which ran due south down the eastern side of

Leigh Road and was entirely culverted in the mid-20th Century.



1870's map showing the route of the Lavant Stream through the town

Half way down North Street the Lavant Stream then makes another right angle turn to flow under the north side of Elm Lane, emerging once more to form the southern boundary of Havant Park. It then disappears under Park Road North and makes one final ninety degree turn to the south before re-emerging on the west side of Park Road South in Boys Brigade Gardens, where some old flint rubble walling, probably dating from the 1890s, may be seen lining the banks. Here the Brockhampton branch diverges to the west. We shall return to it later.

The main Lavant Stream course continues due south in another short culvert under West Street, although originally there was a bridge here, known as Starr Bridge, which carried the Portsmouth to Chichester main

road.

South of West Street the stream begins to receive the overflow from some of the town's springs, most notably the Homewell spring, and now becomes a truly permanent water course. It re-emerges into public view by the Solent Retail Park and passes under Solent Road to flow past the Tesco store and beneath the Havant bypass. Here was located the Town Mill, the only remnants of which are a replica wooden mill wheel and some brickwork relating to the mill leat. Before its demolition in the 1950s the mill and its substantial millpond dominated the area. The only surviving fragment of the millpond is to be found in the grounds of Dolphin Court, on the east side of Park Road South.

Beyond the bypass the stream can be followed for a while by a footpath. It now flows between, to the west, the massive Langstone Technology Park (built in the 1960s as the UK headquarters for IBM) and, to the east, firstly the new hotel and Langbrook Farm restaurant and then the gardens of the houses in Langbrook Close and Brookmead Way. It then disappears from public view once more, passing Southmere Farm and skirting the eastern fringes of the rather bleak – and usually boggy – South Moor. Here the Lavant has undergone one final (and again almost totally hidden) alteration relating to the now vanished Langstone West Mill. It splits in two, with the eastern branch forming a very long, narrow millpond, before turning at right angles to form the mill leat, and the western branch (which also makes two right angle turns) forming the basin for the barges which serviced the mill. Some remnants of the brickwork lining the banks can still be seen. Joining it is the attractive West Mill house, which must date from at least the 18th Century.

The two branches re-unite shortly before the stream enters Langstone Harbour, not far from Hayling Bridge.

The Brockhampton branch is also largely hidden from public view for the first half of its course. From Boys Brigade Gardens it flows due west, behind the gardens on the north side of West Street, then turns at a right angle to cross under West Street in a culvert at what was once Ruttle Bridge.

From here it continues unseen, skirting the grounds of the Portsmouth Water Company, where it receives the overflow from the Brockhampton springs, briefly emerging into sight at the junction of Solent Road and Brockhampton Road, before disappearing once again beneath the Havant

bypass. Only when it emerges south of Harts Farm Way can it be followed properly, although modern development has not been kind to the area, dominated as it is on the one side by the Budds Farm waste water treatment plant, and on the other by an electricity sub-station, the boatyard for the Sea Angling Club, and the quay where dredger ships unload the sands and gravels they have extracted from the bed of the Solent. The only hint of anything from before the mid- 20th Century is the weir and brick-lined basin associated with the long-vanished Brockhampton Mill.

The stream enters Langstone Harbour at virtually the same point as the Hermitage Stream.

So the Lavant Stream and its Brockhampton branch present very different aspects from what they did up until the middle of the 19th Century, and almost all the alterations (at least above the spring-line) have been made to deal with the 'Lavant' phenomenon – that sudden eruption of huge amounts of water from the chalk down land in very wet winters.

But it is by no means a phenomenon that is unique to the Havant Lavant Stream.

'Lavants', 'Bournes' and 'Woe Waters'

The 'Lavant' phenomenon is to be found in many chalk landscapes, though under a variety of regional names. In Surrey the streams are known simply as 'bournes', in Kent as 'ail' (or 'nail') 'bournes', in Wiltshire and Dorset as 'winterbournes' and in the Yorkshire Wolds as 'gypsies' (pronounced with a hard 'g') or vipsies.

The stream to which the Havant Lavant Stream can be most closely compared is, of course, the Chichester Lavant Stream. This, too, rises from the chalk of the South Downs, usually in the vicinity of West Dean, and flows south through East Lavant, Graylingwell and Westhampnett to enter the north-eastern suburbs of Chichester at St Pancras. It then skirts the eastern and southern fringes of the city in a culvert, to emerge at Westgate Fields not far from the railway station and flows a few miles further south to reach Chichester Harbour at Appledram.¹

There are, however, differences between the two watercourses. The Chichester Lavant Stream is much the larger stream, having a catchment area of some 90 sq.km. compared with the Havant Lavant Stream's 50 sq.km., and

consequently has a more permanent flow from the chalk aquifers. It does not, however, possess any tributary streams equivalent to the Havant Lavant Stream or Durrants Stream for there are no impervious bands of Tertiary clays or sandstones over which it flows as it passes straight from the chalk to the coastal plain. Neither is its lower course supplemented by springs and consequently it has never had any mills erected along its banks.

The 'Lavant' phenomenon has, of course, also brought periodic flooding to Chichester, but up until the late-20th Century efforts to deal with it had been rather piecemeal, and it was not until large parts of the city were inundated in January 1994 that a comprehensive flood prevention programme was implemented.

It must also be noted that the nearby River Ems – although it, too, rises from the chalk aquifers of the South Downs, usually around Mitcham near Stoughton – has never exhibited the 'Lavant' phenomenon, and has not caused the flooding problems in Westbourne and Emsworth that have occurred by both in Chichester and Havant.

However the West Brook, which arises from springs in the Southleigh Forest area and flows down into the mill pond at Bridgefoot, lacks capacity at peak flow times and causes severe flooding in Bridge Road.

There is also a stream, which is fed by springs north of the A27, that flows down to Chichester Harbour. This stream has, in the past, caused flooding in Selangor Avenue but work carried out in recent times to increase its capacity at source has tended to reduce this problem.

Because the 'Lavant' phenomenon is so unpredictable it has given rise in the past to the superstition that its eruption foretold some misfortune, and has thus sometimes led to it being given the name of 'Woe Waters'. Exactly how ancient or how widespread this belief was is impossible to say, although the fact that it is to be found in Jacob Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*² does indicate that it is of some antiquity and is also to be found in continental Europe; indeed it very probably originated there.

The earliest English reference to it comes from the 15th-Century chronicler John Warkworth who, writing of the year 1473 states that:

Also in the same yere Womere watre runne hugely with suche abundance of watere that nevyr manne sawe it renne so much afore this tyme. Womere is callede the woo watere for Englyschman, whenne thei dyd first inhabyte

*this lond, also sone as thei see this watere renne, thei knewe wele it was a token of derthe, or 3 of pestylence or of grete batyle.*³

The topic clearly fascinated Warkworth for he expounded upon it at some length:

*Also ther has ronne dyverse suche other wateres that betokenethe lykewyse; one at Lavesham in Kent, and another byside Canturbury called Naylborne, and another at Croydone in Suthsex (sic), and another vii myle this side of the castelle of Dodley, in the place called Hungervale, that when it betokenethe batyle it rennys foule and trouble watere, and whenne it betokenythe derthe or pestilence it rennyth as clere as any watere, but this yere it ranne right trouble and foule. Also their is a pytte in Kent, in Langley Park, ayens any batyle he wille be drye, and it rayne never so much; and if ther be no batyle towarde, he wille be full of watere, be it nevyre so drye a wethyre, and this yere he is drye.*⁴

It was almost certainly his text that William Harrison used a century later in his voluminous and exhaustive *Description of England* (1586) where, in Chapter XXIV on the *Marvels of England* he writes:

Other welles and water-courses we have likewise, which at some times burst out into huge streams, though at other seasons they run but verie softljte, whereby the people gather some alteration of estate to be at hand.

In the 17th Century this superstition was often mentioned in the rapidly growing number of works of local history and topography that were being compiled, such as Robert Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677) although Plot was of the opinion that:

No heed is to given to such kind of stories, they being equally as vain as the persons that broached them.

But the belief did remain remarkably persistent, and probably the most famous and well-documented example relates to the Croydon Bourne in Surrey. John Aubrey was certainly aware of it when he compiled his *History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* in the 1570s and 80s.

At Stoneham Lane issues out some times (as against any Change in our English Government) a Bourn, which overflows, and runs down in Smitham

*Bottom to Croydon. This is held by the inhabitants and Neighbourhood to be ominous, and prognosticating something remarkable approaching, as it did before the happy Restoration of King Charles the Second, of ever glorious Memory in 1660, Before the Plague of London in 1665, and in 1688, the Aera of another Change of Constitution.*⁵

It is, in many respects, not surprising that the Croydon Bourne had such a malevolent reputation, for its periodic eruptions brought misery to the large and rapidly growing town of Croydon, which even at the best of times was poorly drained and threaded with streams that formed one of the headwaters of the River Wandle. Only comprehensive drainage schemes and a falling water table level in the chalk of the North Downs (due to extraction for water supply) put an end to flooding problems here in the second half of the 19th Century, and the Croydon Bourne has not flowed for many a year. The earliest reference to any such superstition locally is to be found in Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne*, where, in a letter of February 1774 he writes:

*We have had a very wet autumn and winter, so as to raise the springs to a pitch beyond anything since 1764, which was a remarkable year for floods & high waters. The land springs, which we call 'Lavants', break out much on the downs of Sussex, Hampshire and Wiltshire. The country people say that when the 'Lavants' rise corn will always be dear; meaning that when the earth is so glutted with water as to send forth springs on the downs and uplands, that the corn vales must be drowned, and so it has proved for these ten or eleven years past. For land springs have never obtained more since the memory of man than during that period, nor has there been a greater scarcity of all sorts of grain.*⁶

This, however, as White suggests, is a rather different kind of foreboding, for there is a clear cause and effect between the rising of the 'Lavants' and the state of the following summer's harvest. Just how long the belief in the oracular or supernatural nature of 'Lavants' persisted is uncertain, but one late and unusual variant is to be found in Chichester in the early 19th Century when a certain Dr Sandon, writing of the floods which affected the city in 1809, reported that many of the local inhabitants believed that the rising of the 'Lavants' was a punishment *for the greed of farmers and*

middlemen.⁷ By the second quarter of the 19th Century however the phenomenon was beginning to attract the attention of both geologists and civil engineers (who were interested in the hydrology of the chalk because of its relevance to the problem of water supply to London), and a search began for a rational, scientific explanation of ‘bournes’ and ‘Lavants’, in particular what caused them to erupt so suddenly high up in a chalk stratum when there was no flow of water from a lower level. Frustratingly there was no obvious answer. Initially many favoured what became known as the siphon theory, most succinctly expounded by C. W. Johnson in 1853:

*It has been usual to ascribe the origin of such springs to caverns in the chalk soils having an outward opening in the nature of a siphon, and it has been supposed that whenever, from an excess of rain, the level of the water has been raised in the cavern to the height of the bend of the siphon, the discharge commences until the reservoir is entirely emptied, probably the accumulation of several years.*⁸

But this was later more or less abandoned in favour of the idea that, after exceptionally heavy rain, the angle of the water table in the chalk rose more steeply in the upper levels than the lower until it reached the surface and erupted as springs high up the valley.⁹

It was never properly explained why this might be the case, however, and the theory still failed to account for the capriciousness and violence of the eruptions, which at least the siphon theory did.

Even today there is no absolutely comprehensive explanation for why ‘bournes’ and ‘Lavants’ erupt precisely when and where they do, although special topographical and geological features undoubtedly play a significant role.

But whatever popular superstition or scientific theory was attached to ‘Lavants’, the reality of the flooding problems they could cause was all too obvious, and it is to these floods that periodically inundated Havant that we shall now turn.

¹ – See Ken Newberry *The River Lavant: Chichester's River from Source to Mouth* (1987)

² – Translated J. Stallybrass (1888) pages 590-91

³ – *A Chronicle of the First Thirteen Years of the Reign of King Edward the*

Fourth Edition J. O. Halliwell (Camden Society, 1839). Warkworth located Womere at Markyate near St Albans

⁴ – op. cit. Warkworth was, of course, writing during one of the most turbulent periods of the Wars of the Roses

⁵ – John Aubrey *Natural History & Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1719) Volume III page 17

⁶ – Letter XIX Feb. 14th 1774 to Hon. Daines Barrington

⁷ – *Hampshire Telegraph* March 6th 1809

⁸ – Gentleman's Magazine 1853 (Part II) pages 42-44

⁹ – E.g. W. Topley in *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers* Volume 47 (1876) pages 166-67

The Floods of February 1809

Although the town must, of course, always have been prone to periodic floods there is no actual account of one until the following appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of 15 February 1809:

Last week the waters came through the town in torrents, so as to overflow two of the streets and prevent foot passengers from passing.

On Thursday last (9th), the flood came down with increased violence. It covered the whole of North Street and crossed the centre of the town into South Street; it also overflowed Prince George Street; and West Street, from a current that runs through that part of the town, was so completely inundated that the water ran through many of the houses and the inhabitants there were obliged to live upstairs. The fields above and below the town were under water. There has not been such a flood in the neighbourhood since the year 1746.

The 42nd or Highland Regiment, which passed yesterday, were obliged to wade through the waters.

The autumn of 1808 had been exceptionally wet. According to Dr Saunders of Chichester¹ there had been some eleven inches of rain in September and October, and although November, December and January had been somewhat drier these months had also been very cold and the ground had been frozen for much of the time. Consequently when a thaw set in and the rain returned with renewed intensity at the beginning of February the

already saturated chalk had been unable to cope and 'Lavants' and 'bournes' had erupted everywhere. The Hornet and St Pancras areas of Chichester were under water and the Croydon Bourne had also begun to flow, although apparently without any disastrous consequences.

Incidentally if the *Hampshire Chronicle* report is accurate and this really was the first serious flooding that Havant had seen in over fifty years the town must have been exceptionally fortunate, for Chichester had experienced at least three inundations in that time, in 1763, 1771 and 1804.

¹ – *Hampshire Chronicle* 6 March 1809

The Floods of January 1839

The only evidence we have of Havant's next flood is a single entry in the Vestry Minute Book recording an extraordinary meeting which was held on the 11 January 1839

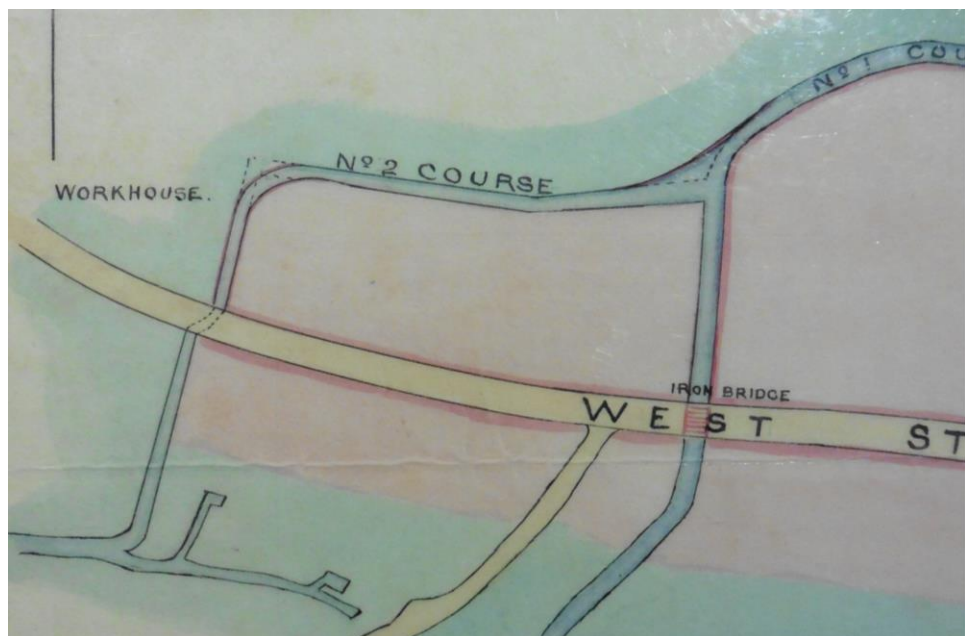
For the purpose of taking into consideration and determining upon the best means of preventing the recurrence of the great inconvenience lately sustained by the overflowing of the watercourses.

at which it was decided that:

The Way Wardens be empowered to raise the necessary rate for carrying the said resolution into effect.

The Havant Vestry was not a particularly active body at this time, meeting only infrequently (sometimes just once a year for the election of officials) and with very sparse attendance. At this meeting however there were no less than thirteen people present – an unprecedented number – and their decision to spend extra money was equally exceptional.

We have no firm evidence of what measures they might have taken, but one distinct possibility is the digging out of the Brockhampton branch of the Lavant Stream which turns west at right-angles in Boys' Brigade Gardens to flow parallel with West Street before turning south, again at right-angles, to cross under West Street. This part of the course is clearly artificial and was certainly that way in 1842 when the Tithe Map was compiled; it became known as the Town Ditch



1879 map showing the route of the Brockhampton branch (No. 2 Course) after being re-routed. It became known as the Town or Potash Ditch.

However on Lewis's 5 inch to the mile map of 1833 the course meanders to Ruttle Bridge in a south-westerly direction. It must, therefore have been altered sometime between 1833 and 1842, and there is one other piece of circumstantial evidence to consider.

In December 1838 the Guardians of the Havant Union Poor Law Authority decided to provide out-door relief for the able-bodied poor because the workhouse was full. This was an extremely controversial decision, which attracted national attention, because it went directly against the intentions of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which sought to abolish such measures and make the workhouse the sole means of relief for the unemployed. On the 5 December the Secretary of the Poor Law Commission, Edwin Chadwick, wrote to the Havant Guardians (in a letter reprinted in the *Hampshire Telegraph* of the 17 December) suggesting that if the workhouse really was full, and there was no other option, the unemployed should 'earn' their relief: *By being set to work.... as was resorted to in the town of Nottingham.* (Here, a few years previously, paupers had been conscripted into tasks such as stone

breaking and road mending.)

So were the unemployed of the Havant workhouse set to work, sometime after January 1839, in altering the course of the Brockhampton branch of the Lavant Stream? If it had not already been done it would have been an obvious project to undertake, not only providing the opportunity to create a more capacious channel but also assisting the development of that part of the north side of West Street by diverting a watercourse which meandered at an oblique angle across the fields and gardens attached to the properties there. At any rate the following winter, after a very wet December when over seven inches of rain was recorded at Chilgrove,¹ Havant seems to have escaped flooding whilst Chichester was inundated.

¹ From 1836 onwards we are extremely fortunate to have monthly rainfall totals and average water table levels recorded at an observation station at Chilgrove on the South Downs a few miles north of Chichester. A total of just over 11 inches was recorded there for the months of November and December 1838.

The Floods of November 1852

November 1852 was one of the wettest months of the entire 19th Century.

No less than 8.62 inches of rain was recorded at Chilgrove, and this was merely the culmination of an extremely wet period which saw 5.2 inches in August, 5.9 inches in September and 6.49 inches in October, all of which caused the water table level in the chalk at Chilgrove (some 250 feet above sea level) to rise almost to the surface, something which it had never done before and was never to do again.

Not surprisingly, therefore, flooding was widespread, not only on the chalk, where 'bournes' and 'Lavants' – some of them inactive for decades - erupted everywhere, but in other areas too, (the River Thames, for example, broke its banks at Oxford and Reading) leading the *Hampshire Telegraph* to confidently assert that *no parallel flooding has occurred since 1341*.¹

In the circumstances, therefore, it is not perhaps wholly surprising that the Havant floods should have escaped the attention of even the local press. What is astonishing, however, is that it barely seems to have come to the attention of the newly formed Local Board of Health either, whose minutes of their regular monthly meeting of 3 December merely note that it was:

Resolved unanimously that the flooding of the cellars in the East Street is a serious nuisance, that it arises from the water that flows down the New Lane and that the surveyor of nuisances be directed to inspect the courses in the New Lane to abate the nuisance and restore the water to its original course,

But in fact half the town was under water, a state of affairs graphically described by C. J. Longcroft in his *Hundred of Bosmere* (p.81) published just a few years later in 1857:

The Lavant Stream of the year 1852 was heavier than for forty years past. For some time the ordinary channels sufficed to carry off the increasing waters, but at last the rush was so great, that the fields to the north of the town presented the appearance of a lake, and the hedges were in many places completely covered. On the 27 November, the flood was at its highest; there was a deep stream from the station to the church corner, and on that and the following day a boat plied in North Street. Carts conveyed passengers over the river which ran across the West Street at the Star bridge; the cellars were filled to the extent of three or four feet deep, and for some time the greatest possible inconvenience prevailed, from the mass of waters pouring through the town.

His account is confirmed rather more prosaically in the diary of another Havant resident, Martha Burrows, whose entry for 26 November 1852 is: *A flood of water came into Havant, flooding the four streets.*²

The fact that even East Street was affected is a sure indication of just how serious the inundation was, for this is the most elevated part of the town and was usually immune from flooding. This is doubtless the reason that it became the most fashionable residential quarter (and still boasts most of the best houses) despite the fact that the prevailing south-west winds blew all the odours from the town's brewing, malting, tanning and parchment-making industries in this direction. These industries had to be located on the western side of the town because of the abundant spring water there.

¹ – *Hampshire Telegraph* 27 November 1852

² – Transcript in Havant Local Studies Collection.

The Floods of January 1877

The winter of 1876/77 was another exceptionally wet one, with a total of 15.72 inches of rain being recorded for the months of December and January at Chilgrove. As in 1852 this led to flooding on a national scale, and again the River Thames broke its banks, leading to so much devastation that a relief fund was set up by the Lord Mayor of London. Havant, of course, could not fail to be affected either, and again the local diarist Martha Burrows provides a concise summary of events:

Ten weeks rain. 'Lavants' broke; came into North Street 3 o'clock in the morning 13th January flooding the houses. Went off 20th January; came into the streets again on 25th January; cleared off in the night.

For the first time, too, we get detailed newspaper reports of the event, that of the *Portsmouth Times and Naval Gazette* for the 20 January being the most comprehensive:

Since Saturday last the two principle streets in Havant (North-Street and West-Street) have been flooded with water several inches in depth – the horses engaged in vehicular traffic having to walk up to their knees in the unprecedented overflow. Many of the occupants in the houses of those streets have been compelled to retire from the ground floors and live in the bed-rooms – several of the shops also being entirely closed up. Efforts have been made by several to keep out the intruding flood from their premises by making impromptu embankments of clay around their doors. On one side of the street mentioned traffic is rendered impassable and pedestrians have to brave the chance of an unseasonable bath by walking along some narrow planking raised on one side of the street above the 'high water mark'. The place bears quite a Venetian aspect – a gondola or two only being required to make the picture perfect. The line of rail between Havant and Langston is also flooded but not sufficiently to interrupt traffic. An artificial ditch is being dug in West-street, which is expected to lower the depth of the stream considerably.

We are also fortunate that have an eye-witness account from a Mr. C. E. Bailey:¹

The last two months of 1876 had been exceptionally wet. Day after day it poured with rain and the many small streams coming from the downs and draining into Langstone Harbour, were turned into raging torrents. As the rain continued these streams began to overflow, and many of the fields to the north of the town were turned into miniature lakes. The stream crossing the road by a conduit at the top of New Lane overflowed, and soon a torrent, confined by the banks of the lane, was pouring down past the cemetery, dispersing into the fields below the railway, and the lane was a veritable millrace..... But worse was to come. The chalk hills were super-supersaturated, and could hold no more water, and – “the ‘Lavants’ were out”..... Day after day we watched the water rising inch by inch, till at last nothing but a miracle could prevent North Street being flooded. At last the water was but a few inches from the top of the rise, and a man was placed there to give warning should it be necessary. The warning came at midnight. Armed with a long pole, he hurried down the street and banged at as many doors as he could reach, and the cry 'Water's in, get up!' rang out in the silence of midnight, and under the lamps the water sparkled as it flowed along. The wise ones proceeded to nail boards half-way up the street doors, plentifully bedaubed with clay. Many, especially those whose doors were flush with the pavement, came down to find a foot of water in the lower rooms. Old Mr. Joliffe, a confectioner living in the first of the cottages opposite the present Congregational Church (since pulled down) stepped into a foot of water in his shop, where movable articles were floating about.

Next day we saw a sight unique in the annals of Havant – a boat being rowed towards the station. True it was a rather hazardous proceeding, as it had a tendency to run aground in the shallow places; but it enabled people to boast afterwards that they had been rowed in a boat to catch a train. I saw one ludicrous incident in this connexion. A well-known inhabitant was being rowed, when he stood up in the boat. At the same time the latter bumped in a shallow and the gentleman went headlong over the side into the water. I had the pleasure of retrieving his snuff box from our doorstep as it floated past.

Near the lake formed in West Street another ancient inhabitant was sailing home (after ‘closing time’) with a full cargo. Forgetting the lake in crossing the road he fell headlong into the water. He got up and tried again,

with the same result. Then he leant against a wall and apostrophised himself thus: 'My boy, you have been going home this way for forty years, and you're not going to be beat now. Try again!' He tried again with the same result, but not to be denied, he crawled through the water on his hands and knees, reached the other side, got up, and reeled off home.

When daylight came we saw a wide stream which spread itself out and dispersed in South Street, and as it still rained, the waters increased, reaching maximum height that evening.

A temporary footway was improvised along one side of the street with planks carried on boxes and crates placed at intervals along the pavement, thus enabling foot passengers to pass up and down in safety. This state of affairs lasted nearly a fortnight, when the fine weather returned, and the waters disappeared; but dwellers in North Street will not forget the aftermath - ground floors covered with mud and slime, wet floors, and damp walls, which persisted long after the flood had disappeared.

¹ – *Havant of Days Past: The Great Flood of 1877. Hampshire Telegraph* 1 February 1935

Writing nearly sixty years after the event Mr Bailey seems to have conflated the floods of '77 and '79 into a single event, for he makes no mention of any subsequent inundation.

Nevertheless it is still an invaluable and dramatic testimony.

The Floods of January 1879

Having experienced just two floods in forty years it must have been quite a shock to the citizens of Havant when the 'Lavants' erupted again on New Year's Day 1879. Once more we have a laconic summary of events from Martha Burrows: *Snow and rain, then froze, then rain and froze, then thawed on Christmas Day. Water came into Havant on January 1st, flooded all the houses.*

And a rather more evocative press account, in this instance from the *Hampshire Telegraph* of 11 January:

The late heavy rainfall has proved not a little disastrous to the inhabitants of Havant, more particularly those residing in North and West streets. The

water in the Lavant Stream increased so rapidly that soon North-street was flooded from end to end, the water pouring across into South-street. West-street also became covered with water in an incredibly short space of time; indeed so fast did the waters rise that one young fellow who passed from east to west without difficulty, found on his return in a few minutes that it was necessary to wade through the flood waters before he could reach home. The first floors of many houses and shops became submerged, in some instances there being 18 inches of water, and of course considerable damage was done to stock-in-trade, carpets, furniture &c. One of the heaviest losers, we regret to hear, is Burrows, the well-known Portsmouth carrier, the contents of whose shop in North-street was literally floating about on Thursday morning. An old lady living near the railway station was actually brewing a cup of tea, when she noticed the water rising, and hastily fled upstairs where she remained a prisoner all night, without her tea, for the fire was speedily extinguished. The water also got into the gas pipes so much as to extinguish the public lights, and on Thursday and Friday evenings the town was in darkness. Early on Thursday morning, the rain having ceased, the floods rapidly passed away, but the meadows in the neighbourhood of Brockhampton were under water for a considerable distance.

During the floods of 1852 and 1877 the inhabitants of Havant could at least console themselves with the fact that they were far from alone in their misery. But in January 1879 I can find no other examples of serious floods anywhere else in southern England. Indeed it was not an exceptionally wet winter, with less than 10 inches of rain falling at Chilgrove between November 1878 and January 1879 – in contrast to the 20 inches recorded there in the same period in 1876/77. So why did Havant alone suffer? It is not an easy question to answer, but there is little doubt about who most people in Havant blamed, and that was the Havant Urban Sanitary Authority (still universally known as 'The Board' despite its recent change of name from Board of Health). This can clearly be seen in the appearance – in what numbers is unknown for there seems to have been only one survivor – of one of the most remarkable documents in the history of Havant: a mock satirical theatre poster advertising a production of: *The Flooded Town and How to Prevent It*.

GUILDHALL - HAVANT

An Original Performance of the
HAVANT DUMMY TROUPE

WILL TAKE PLACE ON

Thursday, April 17th, 1879

UNDER THE DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE OF

E. R. Clerk LONGCRAFT, Esq.

The proceed, will be given for the

BENEFIT OF THE DUPED HAVANT RATEPAYERS

The Performance will commence with the original Drama, entitled

‘THE FLOODED TOWN’ AND HOW TO PREVENT IT

WITH THE FOLLOWING CAST

Hopping Sam

Frank Tanner (his boy)

Step and Fetch it

Chemical Bill.

Head Bachelor

Tripping Jim

Calico John

Dotty Jack

Pious John

Agricultural Jimmy

Farmer George

S. LARKE.

F. HOSTER.

W. T. COOKE.

W. PATRICK.

W. H. OHBURN.

OFTLEIGH JAMES.

J. BULLOCK.

J. HURTHER.

J. HOTWELL.

J. LOINE.

G. STANDARD.

To conclude with the ludicrous farce entitled:

‘NO ADMITTANCE’

The following have consented to appear:

Cavalry Fred	F. FITSWIGGERHEM.
Ginger Jack	J. CAPLEN.
Bald Headed Eli	E. WICKERS.
Corporation William	W. TANG.
Seedy Green	H. J. YELLOW.
Mrs. Swipes	W. S. GROIN.

Doors to open at 6 to commence 6.30 precisely.

Prices of admission: 1s. 4d., 1s. 8d. Tickets can be secured of DICK FURNICE, Tacks Obtainer, North Street, Havant, where a plan of the Room and Photos of the Troupe can be seen.

MILES BOY, PRINTER, HAPPY LAND.

The cast were all members, either current or recent, of the Havant Board (their names so thinly disguised as to be instantly and universally recognisable whilst the 'characters' they played were allusions either to their profession, status or some personal trait).

Thus the principle member of the cast S. Larke, was Samuel Clarke, then Chairman of the Board and probably the most prominent Havant citizen of the time, his character 'Hopping Sam' being an allusion to his brewing and malting interests, although he had his fingers in many other pies.

Second on the bill is F. Hoster ('Frank Tanner – His Boy') who is Francis Foster, owner of the Brockhampton tanning works and Samuel Clarke's son-in-law. Others who appear include John Bulbeck, the draper ('J. Bullock – Calico John'), George Stallard ('G. Standhard – Farmer George') and Frederick Fitzwygram of Leigh Park ('F. Fitzwiggerham – Cavalry Fred') a reference to his army background and his keen interest in horses).

Equally as telling about the resentment felt towards the Board at this time is the second half of the bill; The ludicrous farce entitled: *No Admittance*, which is a reference to the continuing refusal of the Board to admit the press into their monthly meetings. By this time almost all local authorities had long



North Street flooded in the 1880s. Originally the Lavant Stream flowed down North Street and Elm Lane in the open with bridges across. Note the raised walkway which appears to be a permanent feature.



Same time taken from the cross roads.

since allowed their proceedings to be reported upon, and there was a growing clamour for Havant to follow suit.

In fact the resentment aroused by the 1879 floods – and the perceived inertia, croneyism and secrecy of Havant Board which had permitted them to happen – ushered in a period of local political activity that the town had never before experienced. In theory there should have been annual local elections, since each year four members of the twelve man Board were obliged to stand down and either retire or seek re-election after serving a three-year term. But since the inaugural election in 1852 it seems that there had rarely, if ever, been more candidates than there were vacancies and hence no need for a poll ... until, that is, April 1879.

On this occasion there were in fact five vacancies but no fewer than nine candidates, and one member seeking re-election actually got voted out (W. S. Gloyne, the brewer, satirised as ‘W. G. Groin – Mrs. Swipes’¹).

Thereafter elections were held almost every year, and although the old guard, led by Samuel Clarke, still managed to retain a surprising amount of dominance (keeping out the press, for example, until as late as 1887) things were never quite the same again. Indeed even before the election in April the old Board had already decided to undertake substantial improvements to the course of the Lavant Stream.

¹ – Swipes was a slang term for beer of a weak and inferior kind.

The Lavant Tamed; Flood Prevention Measures and Other Works, 1879-97

As early as 6 February 1879, at their regular monthly meeting, the Havant Board appointed a committee, consisting of Samuel Clarke, Francis Foster and William Osburn (W.H. Ohburn the ‘Head Batchelor’ of the Flooded Town poster):

*To inspect the water courses in the District and report at the next meeting of the Board the most efficient means of preventing the flood water from coming down the streets.*¹

This they did, and a few weeks later, on 15 March, an extraordinary meeting of the Board was held to discuss their proposals, which they had drawn up in conjunction with the Board's resident engineer Mr Wyatt. These were in

essence the widening of the main course of the stream in the centre of the town, the construction of a supplementary relief channel on the west side of North Street, the culverting of the section in Bear Lane (now Prince George Street) and the construction of new sluices to regulate the flow of water, especially in the vicinity of Havant Mill. All this was agreed upon, and by June tenders for the work were being invited, that of George Stallard ('Farmer George') for £890 eventually being accepted. It was then proposed that £1,500 be borrowed, not only to cover the cost of the work, but also to pay compensation, since the creation of the relieving channel would entail the demolition of several properties in North Street. The Board also wished to buy up another house in West Street, under which the Brockhampton branch ran, which was in such a deplorable state that it would have to be demolished. The need to borrow such a sum meant that a public inquiry, under the auspices of a Local Government Board Inspector, had to be held, and this took place at the Bear Inn on 22 July. The consent of the Local Government Board was speedily obtained and by September work must have commenced for at their meeting on the 4th of that month the board minutes record that:

The contractor of the water course contract applied for permission to stop the traffic for three days in the North Street and Bear Lane to enable him to carry the supplementary channel across the street.

The work, however, does not seem to have progressed entirely satisfactorily for the Board and the contractor soon became embroiled in a dispute over whether brick or iron should be used for the construction of the Bear Lane culvert. (The contractor favoured iron because it was stronger, the Board brick because it was cheaper. Eventually a compromise was reached in which brick arches were reinforced with iron hoops.)

By the beginning of November the contractor was also applying for an extension to the time allowed to complete the work. The Board agreed – although they insisted that everything had to be finished by 1 December – and there are no indications of any further delays.

But there now arose disputes over money. In January 1880 Mr Wyatt's claim of £44 2s 0d (£44.10p) for his services were questioned by the Board and it was resolved that: *The chairman be requested to see Mr. Wyatt and obtain some explanation of the charges.*²

Eventually, in March, it was agreed to pay him £40. But there were further wrangles with both George Stallard and Mr Barton, the independent surveyor appointed to oversee the work, for the Board were of the opinion that the work had not been carried out in accordance with the contract specifications, and in consequence Stallard should not receive all of the fee that he was demanding. Unfortunately, as Mr Barton had approved the work, the Board had no option but to pay Stallard in full but it was resolved that:

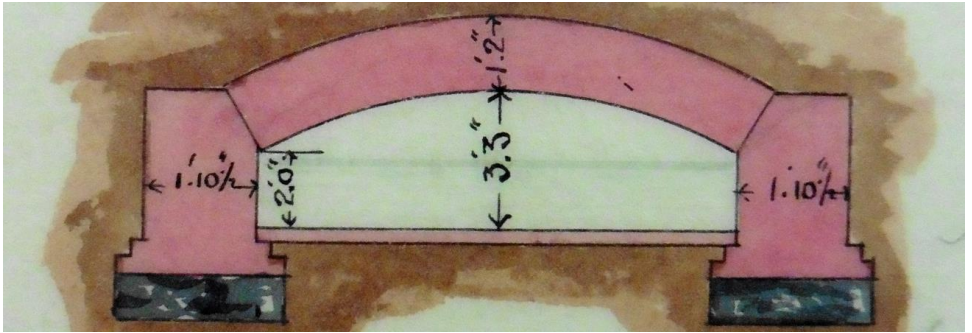
The clerk write to Mr. Barton, informing him that in consequence of him giving a final certificate.... the Board felt bound to pay the amount of balance to Mr. Stallard, but they desire to state that they are not satisfied with the attention which Mr. Barton has given to his work.³

Indeed the Board initially refused to pay Mr Barton his fee of £7 2s. 0d. (£7.10p), and only did so, in February 1881, after receiving a letter from him threatening legal proceedings. Whether the work was satisfactory or not, it was not too long before more improvements were deemed necessary, this time as part of a more general scheme for paving and guttering the streets. In May 1887 a special meeting of the Board was convened:

To consider the question of channelling and guttering all the streets, the paving of the footway from the Yew Tree to the end of the pavement in West Street, the paving and covering in of the Lavant Stream course from the North Street to the Board Room [i.e. that section which runs along the south side of Havant Park and through Boys Brigade Gardens] and the alteration of the watercourse running from Messrs. Stallards' yard in Homewell.⁴

Another special meeting on 21 July approved the tender of £995 submitted by Mr Homans to carry out the work and authorised an application to the Local Government Board for permission to borrow £1,000 to pay for it all. This entailed another public inquiry, which was held at the Board's offices on 24 November, where proposals to borrow further sums for the widening of North Street and contributing towards the cost of a Portsmouth Water Company scheme to construct a pipe to convey the Hermitage Stream past the Bedhampton springs, were also considered. The Local Government Board duly agreed to all three proposals.

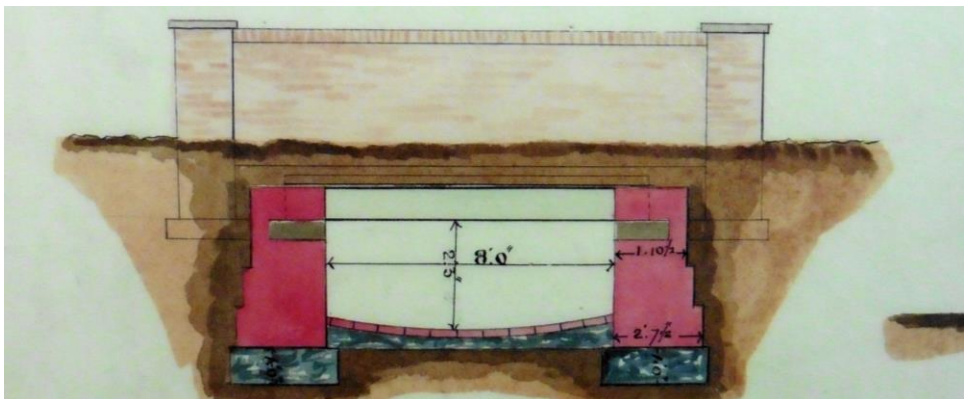
Cross Sections of Works



North Street Culvert



Bear Lane Culvert



West Street Bridge

This time there is no evidence that the work on the Lavant Stream course was either delayed or of inferior quality, but almost as soon as it had been completed the owners of many of the properties in North Street requested that the channels which now ran down both sides of the street should be covered over. In February 1890 it was recorded that the Board's Roads Committee:

*Had communicated with the respective owners of the properties adjoining the Lavant Stream course as to covering in the same and to their bearing part of the cost, which they had agreed to do.*⁵

And at another meeting a week later a resolution proposed by Mr Chignell that: *It is advisable to cover over the Lavant Stream Course in North Street*,⁶ was carried.

But whilst the other improvements to the roads and pavements of Havant went ahead, for some reason the Lavant Stream work did not, and tenders for paving and culverting its course in North Street were only put out in July 1892 (Mr Staples's of £13 15s. (£13.75p) being accepted).

In September 1893 it was also decided to pave the Town Ditch section, with Sarah Rogers's tender of £17 15s. (£17.75p) being preferred, thus completing the paving of the Lavant all the way from the Portsmouth to Chichester railway line to the point where the Brockhampton branch crosses under West Street.

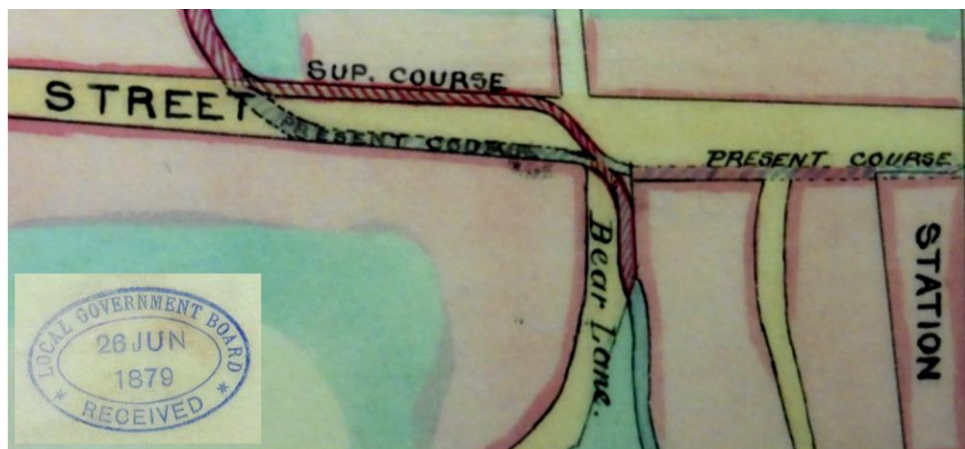
But the work in North Street was still not complete when the Board (officially, of course, the Urban Sanitary Authority but the name had never caught on) became the Havant Urban District Council in December 1894.

Indeed it was not until April 1896 that the final contract to pave and culvert the North Street section on the route of the supplementary course was completed, although unfortunately a month later, on 23 May, a 58 foot section of one of the new culverts collapsed, and only in January 1897 was the repair work finished, nearly £50 having been spent on it. It had taken eighteen years to convert the Lavant Stream in Havant town centre from an open ditch to the paved and mainly culverted channel that we know today.

¹ – Havant Urban Sanitary Authority Minute Book. HCRO 71M 8VDL2

² – Minutes 1 January 1880 ³ – Minutes 1 July 1880 ⁴ – Minutes 19 May 1887

⁵ – Minutes 6 February 1890 ⁶ – Minutes 13 February 1890



1879 plan showing the 'present course' (old culvert) on the east side of North Street and the 'supplementary course' (proposed new culvert) on the west side. Also the culvert in Bear Lane with the 'present course' which used to run down from Leigh Road.

The Floods of December 1914

The years after 1879 were, on the whole, moderately dry, with few notably wet autumns or winters, although an exception was the autumn of 1894 which saw the Chichester Lavant flood a part of the Hornet. Indeed it was not until the winters of 1899 and 1900 (when 20.53 inches of rain were recorded at Chilgrove between November and February) and 1903/04 (when 28.22 inches were recorded between October and February) that potentially severe flooding problems were posed.

But the improved Lavant Stream coped with them well, and so, when, in 1914, after no more than an averagely wet autumn, a period of heavy rain set in early in December – with a continuous twelve hour deluge on the night of Wednesday 9th to Thursday 10th – there seemed to be no cause for alarm. But by daybreak on the 10th large parts of West Street and its environs were under water. The *Hampshire Telegraph* of 11 December describes the scene:

West Street was impassable from the Council Offices to beyond the Workhouse for pedestrians for several hours and premises in Park Road also suffered severely. The water appeared to be deepest between the

bridge over the Lavant Stream and the vicinity of the offices of Mr. E .R. Longcroft. The houses on the same side of the thoroughfare from Messrs. Poate's motor works to the Wesleyan Church were also affected, and at this point the water extended across the road. The water also entered the Workhouse, and the gardens of the premises opposite were submerged at an early hour. The ground near the schools in Brockhampton Lane was similarly affected and the south-west corner of the Recreation Ground was also under water whilst the stream that flows through the town at this point was increased to a torrent. All possible steps were taken by the District Council officials to relieve the situation and pumps were employed to clear the water through the premises of Mrs. Little, Launderess. By ten o'clock, parts of West-street which were submerged at daybreak had been cleared, but a great volume of water still remained in the immediate neighbourhood for some time after this hour.

The Church Boys' School was inundated, the water sweeping right through the building and necessitating the closing of the schools for the day.

It soon became clear what had happened. Five large tar barrels had become wedged into the culverted section under West Street, where Boys' Brigade Gardens is now (although before the source of the problem had been identified rumours began to circulate that in fact a giant fish had become stuck there!)¹ and once these obstructions had been removed the water soon subsided. So, in comparison with earlier floods, which had sometimes lasted for a week or more, the flood of 13 December was a very brief affair.

Unfortunately, it turned out that the barrels belonged to the Urban District Council, who had had them placed in the river and secured by iron chains to each bank, ironically to prevent loose objects floating into the culverts and blocking them. But the sheer force of the water had wrenched them loose and swept them into the culvert, where they had become so tightly wedged that they could only be removed by digging them out from above. In the circumstances, therefore, the Council had no option but to accept liability, and agreed to pay all claims for flood damage – though in the event these amounted to scarcely more than £60 after an independent assessor had examined them all.



December 1914. Crowds gather to watch the Lavant Stream flowing through people's houses and down West Street. These houses were alongside the stream on what is now Boys' Brigade Gardens. The next building was a chapel that was built over the stream.





Flooding in North Street possibly taken at the same time as the West Street flooding but may have been at another time.



[It was said that the problem was caused by local youths making a raft out of these barrels which they lost control of, thus it becoming jammed under the bridge; I once met a person who claimed that he was one of those youths. Perhaps it was those who had in fact released the barrels. *Ralph Cousins*]

¹ – *Evening News & Southern Daily Mail* 18 December 1912



In times of heavy rainfall the Brockhampton branch provides relief



During the Second World War sluice gates were installed here in Havant Park to dam the Lavant Stream to create a 'Static Water Supply' if needed for fire-fighting. As children we liked to lift the gates to see the water flow, that was until the park keeper, Alby Till, who was a fireman, chased us off. *Author*



The structure at Crossland Drive housing the entrance to the pipe which diverts a large amount of the Lavant Stream to the Hermitage Stream at Stockheath Lane. *Author*



The frothing water of the Hermitage Stream is caused by the water diverted from the Lavant Stream at Crossland Drive. Stockheath Lane is on the right. *Author*

Pollution

The floods of December 1914 were not only of much shorter duration than the previous ones, they must also have been the first for a very long time in which the flood water itself was not in a foul state, for Havant had only obtained a proper mains drainage system a few years earlier. Prior to this all manner of refuse would have found its way into the Lavant and Brockhampton Streams and the problem had steadily got worse over the course of the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

In theory at least all human waste would have been confined to cess pits and earth closets, but other sorts of pollution – including the by-products from the town's brewing, malting, tanning and parchment-making industries – would also have been deposited into the watercourses. In addition a large number of animals would have been kept in the town (primarily horses but also dogs, pigs and chickens) whose waste would also have found its way, more likely as not, into the same place.

The first official notice we have of the pollution of the Lavant Stream watercourses is to be found in the report compiled by Robert Rawlinson, the General Board of Health Inspector, who visited Havant in October 1851 and issued a damning indictment of the town's general sanitary state. He strongly recommended that a comprehensive mains drainage and mains water supply be established, and, although the newly-created Havant Board of Health were initially in favour of the idea, it was quietly abandoned a year or two later.

There then followed half a century of quite staggering complacency, exemplified by the stance of those (and there were a great number) opposed to Rawlinson's scheme who, in their petition of January 1852 declared:

That the stagnant refuse in the Lavant Stream Course and the Potash Ditch complained of in the report can easily be cleaned once a week by penning the water in Mr Clarke's spring for twenty-four hours and thereby flooding the course and the ditch.¹

The Board of Health did undertake a limited system of household and street drainage, which took away domestic waste water from laundry, bathing etc. as well as rainwater from the main roads; but since these drains discharged into the Lavant Stream this only made the problem worse, especially after 1872 when Havant obtained a mains water supply.

All this might simply have been a 'nuisance' – unpleasant perhaps but of no

serious consequence – were it not for the fact that, in 1860, the Portsmouth Water Company opened their works in Brockhampton Road, utilising the copious springs adjacent to which ran the befouled Brockhampton stream. There was also a tannery nearby which used the stream to wash the animal hides directly as they came from the abattoir. This was admittedly downstream from the waterworks, but still close enough to constitute a real hazard.

The water company did its best to protect the purity of its springs by creating waterproof barriers (trenches lined with puddled clay) around them, but these could not cope with the 'Lavants' when the springs were inundated.

By the 1880s concerns about the possible contamination of the Brockhampton springs had grown sufficiently for no less than three separate reports to be issued on the matter by various Local Government Board Inspectors, the third of them (in 1886) being Robert Rawlinson, the very same man who had inspected Havant some 35 years earlier. They all drew attention to the dire state of the Brockhampton Stream and their findings so alarmed the Portsmouth Water Company that they even considered abandoning the springs altogether, although eventually they simply decided to reinforce their protective barriers.

But still the Havant local authorities did nothing about the matter, and it was only towards the very end of the century that their hand was forced by the publication of the Thomson Report, and the public inquiry that resulted from it a year later.

Dr Theodore Thomson was yet another Local Government Board Inspector, and his report *The Conditions Topographical, Geographical and Sanitary of the Havant Districts (Urban and Rural) and their Relations with the Sources of the Borough of Portsmouth Company's Water Supply* was, in essence, the same as all the previous ones. The difference was in its timing, for it was published in the middle of October 1897, at the very height of the Maidstone typhoid epidemic, the most deadly outbreak of the disease in the entire 19th Century, which claimed over 100 lives and the cause of which was soon identified as the pollution of the local water company's springs by sewage. Thomson's report, therefore, caused a sensation, and made people aware, possibly for the first time, that the foul waters of the Lavant and Brockhampton Streams were not just offensive but potentially lethal. Particularly alarmed were the Portsmouth Borough Council who met early in November in a state of near panic, one councillor declaring that, even as they were debating the issue *possibly thousands of our townsmen are being poisoned*.²

It also resulted in the Portsmouth Water Company making a formal complaint

to the Local Government Board that the Havant local authorities *have made default in providing sufficient sewers* thus instigating a public inquiry in December 1898 that effectively put the local authorities on trial.

The inquiry was held at the Urban District Council Offices in West Street on 14 and 23 December, with full legal representation for both the water company and the Urban District Council. The water company's counsel, Mr MacMorran, called a string of witnesses, all of whom testified either to the insanitary state of Havant in general and its watercourses in particular, or to the inertia of the Urban District Council, or to the relative ease and cheapness of establishing a proper mains drainage system in the town.

Most of the evidence relating to the pollution of the watercourses naturally concentrated upon the Brockhampton Stream, but as an indication of how bad the Lavant Stream also was at this time is given by the testimony of Kiss Shaw, of Southbrook, whose garden bordered onto the Lavant Stream. She informed the inquiry that she kept Aylesbury ducks upon the stream, but so polluted were its waters that *people refused to eat them*, which caused much amusement amongst those in attendance.³

The Urban District Council, in contrast, called no witnesses of its own and relied solely upon the oratorical powers of their counsel, Mr Radcliffe, to plead as best a case as he could for not having a mains drainage scheme imposed upon the town. (The existing scheme, in which the watercourses were flushed out regularly with penned spring water was, he assured the inquiry, *the very best system they could possibly have, if properly administered*.)⁴

But the inquiry could only really have one outcome, and in April 1899 the Local Government Board duly informed the Urban District Council that they had just six months to submit to them plans for a comprehensive mains drainage scheme. Faced with little alternative the council were at last stung into action, although it was to be another decade before the town was properly drained.

In the meantime, in 1903, yet another inquiry into the foul state of the Brockhampton Stream was undertaken, this time by Hampshire County Council, who were primarily concerned with the possible contamination of the watercress beds which were located at Broadwater, a few hundred yards south of the Brockhampton springs (now largely taken up with the western end of Solent Road, the Havant bypass and the modern development on either side of them.)

On 12 August 1903 a sub-committee of the County Council's General Purposes Committee visited the watercress beds and found that they were:

Principally fed by the Brockhampton Stream which is in a most offensive condition, containing sewage together with the filth and disgusting waste products from the Havant Parchment Works. There is, in addition, a heap of refuse at the side, the liquid matter from which must also drain into the watercress beds.

They concluded that:

*This state of affairs naturally renders the watercress liable to contamination with typhoid and other pathenogenic organisms.*⁵

As most of the cress was sold in Portsmouth the Borough Council were also much alarmed by these findings.

By this time the Urban District Council had become well and truly embroiled in bureaucratic tangles with a number of bodies regarding their drainage scheme – for example the Admiralty and the Board of Trade over the discharge of treated sewage into Langstone Harbour and the Local Government Board regarding adjustments to the Urban District boundaries – which effectively prevented them making any real progress for years. Indeed it was not until 1906 that they were at last able to invite tenders for the work of laying the main drains and not until 1908 that this work was completed. Moreover it took at least another two years before every house in the Urban District was connected.

Slowly, therefore, the condition of the Lavant and Brockhampton Streams improved, but some waste from the parchment and tanning works continued to find its way in to them before these industries finally ceased in the 1930s.

Only then were the waters of the Lavant and Brockhampton Streams returned to the sort of purity that they had not known possibly for many centuries.

¹ – Copy in the local studies at Havant Museum. Potash Ditch was an alternative name for the Town Ditch. (See Appendix I)

² – *Portsmouth Evening News* 3 November 1897

³ – *Southern Daily Mail* 24 December 1898

⁴ – *Southern Daily Mail* 31 December 1898

⁵ – *Hampshire County Council Reports & Proceedings 1903/04* (p.127)

Modern Times

In 1912 the Lavant Stream, like all other Hampshire watercourses, became the responsibility of the Hampshire Rivers Board (later the Hampshire Rivers Authority and now under the auspices of the Environment Agency). Their main

concern in the post-war years was to adapt the river's course to the rapid urban expansion of Leigh Park by lining the bed and banks with paving from the top of New Lane to Crossland Drive, work which was mainly carried out between 1956 and 1962. At the same time they also constructed the relief pipe at Crossland Drive to divert excess floodwater into the Hermitage Stream at Stockheath Lane. This pipe is 1.37 metres (54inches) in diameter and has a maximum capacity of 3 cumecs (cubic metres per second). Further improvement work, which cost over £200,000, was carried out in the early 1970s.¹

All this has proved adequate to prevent flooding in Havant, but these flood prevention measures were tested to the limit in November and December 2000, following the unprecedented amount of rain which had been falling ever since 2 September.

The 'Lavants' erupted on 9 November,² the earliest date ever recorded (the previous earliest being 26 November in 1852). By this time the Chichester Lavant Stream was already causing flooding problems at Singleton, and Chichester itself was only saved by pumping water out of the river and onto the fields north of the city. The River Ems was also at danger level – a state of affairs that was to continue until the middle of January – and even the Brighton Bourne, dormant in living memory, had erupted at Patcham.

By 13 November the fields to the north of the Wakefords Way recreation ground were under water, but below this point the river channel was still able to cope, although the Crossland Drive relief pipe was operating at near full capacity.

The rain, however, continued to fall. By the end of the month Finchdean and Dean Lane End were badly affected and by the middle of December even the Crossland Drive relief pipe was under strain and water was overflowing onto the adjacent footpath leading through the grounds of the old Oak Park school. The level of the river in Havant town centre was also dangerously high, and at Boys Brigade Gardens it was literally just a single course of brick below the top of the bank. The worst period of all was probably 15 to 18 December, when water actually had to be pumped out of the Lavant Stream at Crossland Drive, some of it being deposited into the main drains, the rest slightly further downstream. After this the crisis passed, although in Havant itself the water table level had risen to an extremely high level and new springs – or springs that had been inactive for many a year – began to erupt, especially in Brockhampton Lane. The Portsmouth Water Company springs at Brockhampton also overflowed and for a fortnight or so at the end of December the surrounding fields north of Solent Road were completely submerged.

Fortunately the rest of the winter passed without serious incident and the waters slowly began to recede. But the 'Lavants' continued to flow from the area south of Idsworth church until April, and it was not until May, when there was a prolonged spell of warm, dry weather, that the flow from the chalk ceased altogether.

One would like to think that if the flood prevention measures could cope with the unprecedented rains of the autumn and early winter of 2000 they could cope with anything. But if, as many predict, we are to expect more exceptional weather events in the near future then perhaps we have not seen the last of the improvements needed to keep Havant safe from 'Woe Waters'.

¹ – *Hampshire Rivers Authority Annual Report 1972* page 23

² – The following account is based on personal observations.

Appendix I

The Lavant Name – Robert West

Lavant is a complex word, a river name that has, almost uniquely, become a common noun, about which practically nothing can be said with any degree of certainty. The river name itself is of some antiquity. The Chichester Lavant is first recorded in the Domesday Book (the villages of East, West and Mid Lavant take their name from the river not vice versa) whilst the great authority on river names Eilert Ekwall has found other river River Lavants on the continent (e.g. in Carinthia, Southern Austria) that are mentioned in documents dating from as early as the 9th Century. Ekwall himself favoured a Latin derivation of the name from the root *labo* 'to totter', *labor* 'to glide', *labes* 'to fall', but since he admits that *these special meanings do not suit the river names* it is difficult to understand why he adopted such an explanation.¹

Others before him in the 19th Century preferred either an Anglo Saxon origin, from *lafian* 'to sprinkle with water', or a Norman French one, either from *lever* 'to rise' or *laver* 'to wash' (the definition favoured by the Oxford English Dictionary).² But which, if any, of these is correct is anybody's guess.

Exactly when the name became attached to the Havant stream is also unclear, but I can find no reference to it before the middle of the 19th Century – it certainly does not appear in Walter Butler's *Topographical Account of the Hundred of Bosmere* published in 1819 – and even after that date the section south of the spring line was often known as Southbrook, Langbrook or the Mill Stream.

The Brockhampton branch never seems to have been known as anything other than the Brockhampton Stream, although its earliest recorded appearance seems to be on the first edition of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map published in 1870.³

However the section north of West Street was sometimes known as the Town Ditch, or, occasionally, the Potash Ditch (since it flowed past the potash works which was to be found here in the mid-19th Century) but again neither of these names is of any antiquity and were probably only coined after this section was altered in about 1839.

The term 'Lavant' for a generic name for a suddenly erupting 'bourne' is also not found until surprisingly late – indeed not until it appears in Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selbourne* in 1774,⁴ although Judith Glover in her *Place Names of Sussex* (1975) records an old Sussex saying: *How it did rain! It ran down the street in a 'Lavant'*.

It is a purely local term, being confined to Hampshire and Sussex, and was often used in the plural e.g. *the 'Lavants' are up!*

¹ – Eilert Ekwall *English River Names*, pages 263-4. ² – See e.g. Revd L. V. Harcourt *Celtic Antiquities Near Chichester* in *Sussex Archaeological Collections Vol. I* (1848) page 149; and Revd W. D. Parish, *A Dictionary of Sussex Dialect* (1875). ³ – Richard Coates *Place Names of Hampshire*, entry for Brockhampton. ⁴ – Letter XIX February 1774

The Lavant Name – John Pile

Professor Richard Coates believes that 'Lavant' is derived from a Celtic word meaning 'the washer', no doubt referring to the spectacular flooding that both the Havant and Chichester Lavants sometimes cause. Richard believes that the word is only fortuitously associated with the Latin verb *lavare* 'to wash' but is actually an (unrecorded) Celtic word like *louent* or *lovent*.¹ Although it takes a specialist scholar like Richard to unravel the origins of some of our place-names, the names themselves, such as 'Lavant', were simple and unsophisticated descriptions. What could be simpler than describing the flood of clear water that periodically came down the valley and swept over the fields and meadows on the coastal plain as 'the washer'? Apart from explaining the meaning of the name, it gives us a little insight into the minds of the people living here before the Saxons arrived. ¹ Richard Coates, Review of A.L.F. Rivet and C.C. Smith, *The place-names of Roman Britain* (1979), in *Journal of English Place-Name Studies*, **13** (1981), 59-71.

Appendix II

Chichester Lavant and Havant Lavant Streams Floods in the 18th and 19th Centuries

1713 – Chichester only	1839 (January) – Havant only
1746 – Havant only	1839 (December) – Chichester only
1763 – Chichester only	1852 – Havant and Chichester
1771 – Chichester only	1868 – Chichester only
1804 – Chichester only	1877 – Havant and Chichester
1809 – Havant and Chichester	1879 – Havant only
1826 – Chichester only	1894 – Chichester only

The Lavant Stream in the Rowlands Castle Area

Paul Marshman

So far we have been considering the problems caused by the flooding of the Lavant Stream in Havant but it must be recognised it has already caused severe problems in the Rowlands Castle area before reaches here. Fortunately Havant has been able to put in place been engineering solutions to be able to reduce the inconvenience caused. Work has been carried out in the Rowlands Castle area which will help relieve, but not permanently cure, future events.

The following article gives an interesting account of where the stream rises and reasons why in the distant past it might not have been a problem. First-hand accounts by Rowlands Castle historian, Paul Marshman, of various occurrences of flooding are also included.

The Lavants at Finchdean

F. O'B Adams – 1958

What is the reason of this somewhat curious occurrence. One cannot be sure when the Lavants will what is known locally as "rise" or "break". Over a period of many years there has been a break of from four to seven years between each occurrence, exceptions being only after a very wet autumn or winter. The place where the first signs appear is a spot called 'Crook's Corner', Old Idsworth, from where the water winds its way through the valley, past the old Church of St

Peter's and the site of the old Manor House of Idsworth, through the village of Finchdean, Dean Lane End and a part of the Stansted Estate, and eventually to the sea.

As it flows along flooding the low-lying fields, other peculiar things happen. Hundreds of miniature fountains force their way up through the water and adjoining land.

The main cause of the Lavants is the saturation effect of the chalk-down most of which is under cultivation and under the plough, so that in effect the surface which is only a thin layer of soil is laid open to soak up all the rain or snow that falls. Chalk is well known for seepage and it is only when the water seeping through reaches the formations under the chalk that any serious obstruction occurs. This could be flint, clay or rock.

Lavants or bournes were really common along the south. Although no doubt getting less as time goes on, they have given names to quite a number of villages. In fact the cause of these Lavants is the composition of the chalk-downs. Under the mass of chalk are strata of clay, rock and a clayish sandstone called greensand and these are at irregular levels. For instance, the clay and greensand are at a lower level to the north side of the down to that of the south side. The water which is held in the chalk as it filters through follows the line of these different levels, so we have continuous streams rising north of Petersfield, finding their way as rivers to the south coast. It is when the build-up of the water-shed reaches the higher level that it breaks through or "rises" at a weak spot. Here, locally, it is in the region of Crook's Corner. This goes on until the water level goes down as the other breaks, such as the permanent streams, take it away. There is no doubt that the valleys through which the Lavants or bournes run were once permanent streams. It is known that in some districts some very small rivers or streams dry up whilst others increase and one of the causes of this has been the clearance of woodland. The roots of the trees make a seepage through the clayish soil and so form continuous streams. The downs each side of Crook's Corner are between 300ft and 500ft above sea level, but the corner is only 178ft, gradually going down to 126ft at Dean Lane End, 103ft along Finchdean Road and 97 ft the other side of the arches. This is well over 100ft lower than Horndean.

In all probability the Lavants at Finchdean or Idsworth have only occurred in the last century or so. It does not seem feasible that a Manor House such as there was at Old Idsworth would have been built there when its cellars, etc., could have been flooded every four to seven years.

Previous to the industrial revolution, no doubt the downland was covered with forests. At that time parts of the country were denuded of trees, especially in the south where wood was used for the smelting of iron. Trees and forests do form a deterrent to flooding in many ways marvellous to nature. As well as being dams and pipes, they are fountains in so far as they take moisture in from the soil and send it up into the sky through their leaves, so increasing the cloud. It is well known that forests have a great effect on rainfall. The build-up of humus under the trees also has an effect on floods. As this consists of 25% moisture, a huge amount of water is held on the surface without seeping into the chalk underneath. Where vegetation exists the temperature of the air is altered by the evaporation of water through it. For instance, where 1lb of dry substance from corn is produced, about 200lb of water is evaporated, and with turnips eachlb of substance, 800 lbs of moisture is transpired. It is estimated that an acre under cultivation producing five tons of substance would send upwards into the atmosphere 2,500 tons of moisture. If a full grown willow tree can send up to five thousand gallons upwards in a single summer, what would a forest do?

Without doubt, the clearance of the woodland and the cultivation of the land has had an effect on the breaking of the Lavants and may indeed be the main cause. If, as it is supposed, there is an underground stream, there would be a subsidence somewhere along its course in such flat low-lying land. This happens where hidden streams run under higher-than-sea-level ground. There is one of these under a part of Rowland's Castle, and many years ago a small oak tree was seen to gradually disappear into it. It is in fact a natural soak-away for the land water of Castle Road. Many of the dells scattered about the countryside are the results of subsidence; no doubt the reason why the Golf Links had the name of "Swale" or Swallow holes owing to the underground stream.

Parish Council

The annual public meeting of the Rowlands Castle Parish Council took place in the Parish Hall, Major Clarke Jervoise (Chairman) presiding. The Chairman said correspondence had passed between them and Petersfield Rural District Council in connexion with flooding of the Lavants at Finchdean and they had now persuaded the District Council to widen the bridge at Dean Lane End and clean the ditches which would help to cure the trouble.

Evening News, 1 February 1937

LAVANTS FLOODING

Owing to the excessive rain, the Lavants have broken and there has been much flooding. Finch-houses have had their cellars full of water. There is every indication that the footbridges, which have been out of use both, at Finchdean and Rowland's Castle, for some time will again have to be used, as the Lavants cross the roads at these places.

Evening News, 23 March 1938

Lavants Flow Twice This Year

The Lavants those mysterious, unpredictable floods in the Finchdean area, have broken through again. For the fortnight the water, which bubbles up through the earth in Old Idsworth, has flowed like a river along the road near the church, through the park beyond Finchdean and down through deep culverts past Dean Lane End to Rowlands Castle, where it has flooded Woodberry Lane.

Usually the Lavants rise early in the year and generally four to seven years separate appearance. This year they have appeared twice – the first time in March – and that's when it has set the locals talking again. None knows for certain the source of the Lavants but there are many guesses. General belief is that there is an underground basin and that water from the hills flood it. Near the George and the railway arches the "overflow" thrusts its way through the hard road surface. The stream flows underground through Havant where at one time it flooded the streets.

Many an old inhabitant has a smile when the Lavants appear for they are reminded of the Good Ship Dean Castle. Old Harry Price – he's 76 now – and his pal Nelson Pearson some 40 years ago built a punt and sailed on the Lavant course through the village. Harry had the "old timers" in the George the other evening in fits of laughter as he recalled the incident.

It appears that near the railway arch he was "shipwrecked" and threw his pal into the water. That night the lads of the village sank the boat with a rick-stone. "We used to make our own fun in those days and how much better it was" said Harry, as he wiped the tears of mirth from his eyes.

Evening News, 13 December 1951



No doubt this photograph shows Harry Price in his punt at Dean Lane End. The year being about 1911.

The Lavants 1988

This report is written in celebration of the rising of the Lavants the first time the stream can be said to have really flowed since the 1960s.

News came through in the first week of February that the Lavants had risen up at Idsworth.

From the train on the 6 February I observed more water than usual in Maize Coppice and in the fields prior to the clay pit. 7 February. The stream had just got to the tunnel in Stansted. In Maize Coppice springs were in flow from the corner of the field towards the clay pit. The cross ditch from the tunnel to Finchdean Road was nearly full, the one at the end of the wall had a little water in it. The stream at Drews Farm was full and flowing fast, there was water in the fields there. At Dean Lane End the water was across the road by the arch about four to six inches deep, the ditch was full of course. At Finchdean water was at the bend between the old Ironworks and the Cottage and from near Ashcroft Lane to the other arch, fully across the road and up to 4 inches deep. Water was all the way up and about in Finchdean Park as you would expect. At Idsworth the small arch to Heberdens Farm was flooded and water was crossing the road at Crook's Corner and flowing down the full width of the road from there to the S bend on the road to Woodcroft/Chalton, once again up to 4 inches deep. At the S bend the

arch that is Postmans Walk was flooded out. This is where it is generally accepted that the Lavants starts, the archway was impassable but I am assured that the stream does not begin on the other side at all but further up.

During the week it got worse, it crossed Woodberry Lane by Monday, the dell there was filling up with spring water the Saturday before, and soon all the little arches there were flowing. During week ending 13 February it rained a lot. By Thursday night, perhaps earlier, the corner in Finchdean Road had water laying there, about 4 to 5 feet out into the road and 4 inches deep, it was coming from the end of the wall and flowing down and across the road to the lowest point. On Saturday 13th it rained some more, by 6.0pm the water at Finchdean bend was almost across the road and also into the garden there, about half way up the path to their door. The field from the tunnel to Woodberry Lane was completely flooded, the dell very full and the water across the road deep, wide and fast.

The following week it did not rain which helped a lot and the waters slowly went down.

I did not in fact go down the whole of Finchdean Road until the end of the month when I discovered 'Flood' warning signs at two points presumably they had been there for some time, probably since the heavy rain but the water in the ditch seemed to be fed by springs and could not escape because the ditch had been filled partly in.

21 February. Water at Woodberry Lane still deep and fast. There was sheet of water in Maize Coppice field. At Clarkes Dell there was no sign of anything unusual (it had recently been filled in but was part of the event in days of old having a spring which used to rise in sympathy). At the bend in Finchdean Road the water was almost gone although it was still coming across at the end of the wall. There was a large pond in the field beyond Courtlands and another almost opposite and a very large one opposite Drews Farm. At Dean Lane End the water was no longer breaking the bank but was still across the road, it was being partly fed by a trickle of water coming down the side of the road from a spring about 100 yards up. In Finchdean there was still a lot of water about at the arch and also at Idsworth but not as much as on the 7th. Crook's Corner down noticeable.

28 February. Still flowing across Woodberry Lane but none at the bend in Finchdean Road. Not a lot at Dean Lane End but still a little in Finchdean village and in the road by the arch.

It was on this day that I noticed that there appeared to be springs by No. 83 Finchdean Road and in Finchdean itself by Ashcroft Lane.

6 March. Water still flowing across Woodberry Lane though very much down,

the Tug-of-War team were out practising on the field there. At Comley arch the water was still flowing through Maize Coppice.

9 March. Woodberry Lane was dry when I checked in the evening.

11 March. It had ceased altogether, there was still water in the clay pit in Maize Coppice and in the dell by Woodberry Lane (about a third full). There was brackish water in ditches here and there, mostly Finchdean Road, no doubt caused by it not being able to drain away naturally.

From then and for a while white patches were noticeable where the Lavants had been, caused perhaps by chalky deposits in the stream itself.

Despite its power the stream did little to clear the bed, the part from the tunnel to the fields along Finchdean Road was soon a tangle of undergrowth again. I am reminded here that apart from the ford type crossing there used to be another here across a narrow bridge with a well-defined (and obviously often used) footpath. Mr C Miles remembers, and my mother confirms, that the Lavants used to rise and run along the Chalton road also. It came from springs at Wick Farm and down the road to the Finchdean Green (pound). Some went into the ditch there and probably under the Cottage but it also flowed in front of the George and down the field there to the railway arch (which was well full this time also).

Interestingly the Geological map shows a bed of gravel along the length of the Lavants course (pointing to an ancient more continuous river than today) with an offshoot up to Wick Farm exactly. During the whole of the rising I also observed the stream at the bridge in Crossland Drive and along New Lane. Both points were vastly higher than normal and I seem to remember a bit in the *Evening News* about flooding in the Eastern Road, Havant (caused no doubt as much by the blocking of the water by refuse as by its increase in volume). All these last places outside the village are still the same water course.

HOMES FLOODED AS RIVER ERUPTS

Big mop-up for soaking village

A MAJOR mopping-up operation got under way at Finchdean today to clear flooding caused when an underground river erupted spilling millions of gallons of water into the village.

The River Lavant's underground spring network burst on to roads and fields after heavy rain yesterday morning, causing two-mile floods from Idsworth to Rowlands Castle.

Horndean firemen battled for more than two hours to pump away floods up to

five or six feet deep.

One Finchdean family protected their cottage with sandbags to prevent water seeping in.

Some sections of road around the village were still submerged under inches of water today.

One fire spokesman said the torrential flooding was spectacular. "Water ran down the road in torrents, turning fields into lakes," he said.

"The drains just couldn't cope with the volume of flooding, I have never seen anything like it." The spokesman said further flooding risks were possible if heavy rain fell again.

Finchdean villager Mr. John Price said the springs burst overground once every ten years.

"I have lived here all my life, but I do not remember flooding this bad for at least 20 years," he said.

"There is not much anyone can do about it, the springs are everywhere and the flooding could be with us for weeks."

Mr. Price said he thought the problem had worsened over the years as developers filled in ditches when they built housing.

"You can tell the problem has been with us for years because there- is a special boardwalk running to the village church so people can still get there in times of flooding," he said.

Evening News, 8 February 1988

The Lavants 1994

No trace on Wednesday 29 December 1993, even at Old Idsworth. However the fact that I looked goes to show that it was expected.

It started on Monday 3 January. By the evening of Thursday 6 January it was at and crossing Woodberry Lane, that evening and early night it snowed heavily.

By the weekend, the next time I could have a look in daylight of course, it was flooding in Maize Copse field where it could not cross the dell and it made a new route along the bridleway. The dell in Woodberry Lane was full and up to the wall. The bend in Finchdean was flooded and the Fire Brigade were there with pumps Saturday afternoon, night and Sunday to mid-day. The fields along Finchdean were half flooded. At Drews Farm the Lavants made another course through fields and hedgerows and across the footpath. At Dean Lane End completely across and down the road. The Fire Brigade dug a route through the bank and hedge to put water into the fields. Ron Anthony's house and bend sand-

bagged, the spot where the cars are parked was flooded up to the wall. The road was cordoned off here and at the Castle Inn.

On Sunday 9th at Finchdean, two fire engines, one pumping water into field between George and farm. The cross ditch behind the blacksmiths was full, water was across road at the railway arch and then just beyond Idsworth Gardens in the road for about 100yds or more, in the fields here as normal. Water in the road to Dean Lane End where it was pouring onto the road about 100yds from the arch. Water in the ditch up to Wick Farm and in the road at Rats Castle, Woodpeckers and Wick Farm, the well there was dry but water in the fields opposite, appears to come from a spot about 60yds from the bottom of Slant hill towards Finchdean. At this time it was only 1 or 2 inches deep and not all across the road.

The pump started again Sunday night in Finchdean bend and Monday night. There was a siren at 6.00pm. Monday evening I looked and in Woodberry the water was almost at the bend and into Glendale. Woodberry Lane was now closed and the water at Finchdean bend was right up to the wall. Pat Carter said it was even deeper that morning. (Monday 10 January.)

The stream along New Lane very full. I was told that the fields at Comley were flooded and that the farm shop was in a small lake.

By 12 January the stream along New Lane even higher. Glendale was now sand bagged off with the water right up to them. Workers at this spot were letting the water go into the manhole there which they had lifted off (this was about 4.50pm on way home). The water was cascading in from all around. Maize Copse field looked like one sheet of water. Stansted drive was flooded by the water being pumped from Finchdean bend where they had got the level down to only half the road flooded.

Saturday 15th, Comley arch; stream under railway is 15yds or so wide both sides with large pools both sides of the line on the Rowlands Castle direction. The bridleway is covered at the base of the ramp, on the other side towards Havant ponds are overflowing and the right hand side has water in the field and in the field beyond. There is water on the railway line here.

Woodberry Lane is still sandbagged at Glendale and the water is coming through the footbridge here down the road and then into Maize Coppice along the bridleway. The road is blocked off here but cars are still going through. At Finchdean bend the fire engine is still pumping water into the Sling, there were three fountains of water spraying the air, the level is being kept down here but there is a stream of water coming down the road from the point where the wall

meets the fields. At this point two more fire engines, one red and one green, are also pumping, along the road here water is coming through the wall. The fields here are higher than the road. The gardens of No 21, Morag and Richburg have water in them. The ditch along the road is also full. The stream has also forced another route through the Sling here.

Sunday 16 January. A stream is now crossing the road to the south of Netherley Farm (probably rising some point to the north and east). It crosses the field opposite and like a river it flows and enters Wick road by the hedge. It flows down Wick road, full width all the way to Finchdean, certainly four inches deep at least. The water is in the fields here also. At Rats Castle it crosses their garden between door and road. Water in copse opposite. It shows a bit of a respite as it approaches Finchdean but at the start of Ashcroft Lane water is flowing from the field to the left and from here to the Pound it is in the road again. A sandbagged bank takes the water behind the blacksmiths and between the Cottage and the factory. There are three green-goddesses here, a mobile restroom, a chuck wagon and ether fire vehicles here. Water is being pumped into the field behind the George still and it is still in the road leading to Dean Lane End where it is now a river and about 1½ft deep at the arch. The road at Dean Lane End completely blocked with sand bags. At the bend by Powells House in Finchdean Road the road is flooded, the water in their field being deeper than opposite where the stream is flowing along the field. The ditch here is now full, water gushing out of some partly laid pipes and up through the manholes, down garden paths and water is in the gutter along most of the road.

That week it slowly went down but the pumps still worked most of the time.

By the weekend of 23rd/24th the water at Comley arch looked no worse. At Woodberry Lane the water had gone down below pavement level and was not up against the wall. There had been extra holes knocked in the wall here allowing a faster flow. In Finchdean road it was still flowing along the road and still in the gardens. The path into Stansted drive was now walkable but very muddy of course but the water was still across the drive where it had been pumped in and water was still across the road at Powells field.

During the week 31 January to 6/7 February heavy rain overnight Monday/Tuesday caused the water level in the New Lane ditch to rise again. It was very muddy water so it could have come from the Maize Coppice area. By Wednesday the level was down again. Wednesday evening at Woodberry Lane there was a lot less, more like a normal Lavants. By Friday evening about the same, no water at Finchdean bend and although it was still coming down the

road the drains were coping. Woodberry Lane was now blocked off properly but the barriers had been moved aside. On' Sunday morning there was a double barrier at Glendale and a large tree branch in between, there was a single barrier the other side of the water crossing here. The road could be seen to be in a bad state where the Lavants crossed. It was still flowing but down a lot.

Sunday 13 February. Roads at Woodberry Lane and Dean Lane End arch still closed to traffic although barriers moved to one side. Water about 2 to 3 inches deep only. Road at Dean Lane End clearly, marked with official signs saying road is flood damaged. Water is still coming down through the arch at Dean Lane End from the fields. Ditch at Dean Lane End still very full. Finchdean village road to Idsworth still blocked and sand bagged. Water is still flowing down through the iron works and along the road at the railway arch but no trace of it along Wick hanger. Not a lot along Finchdean road but half way along the ditches are full.

Saturday 19 February, a small amount at Dean Lane End arch but ditch still full. At Woodberry Lane only a little flow, water in dell there gone down beneath where it is connected to stream. No water in Finchdean bend but some still in ditches and fields.

Water still flowing through Carpenters and old iron works at Finchdean but only a little.

Sun 27 February. Water still flowing across Woodberry Lane but only 2 inches deep. Some water is still in fields at Dean Lane End and a little at the arch. At Finchdean a trickle is still coming down from arch and through Carpenters garden.

Monday 7 March. Still flowing. Wednesday 9 March. Stopped, but still in ditch at Dean Lane End and Finchdean arch.

At its height Pat Carter saw it over the footbridge in Woodberry Lane and with photographic evidence. The papers did voice some concern that the bursting of this natural dam, this is the wall in Woodberry Lane could cause a sudden flood as far away as Havant. Two extra holes were knocked in the wall and the hedge opposite was also grubbed out, though not necessarily at the same time.

Mr Potter has photos of water in his garden, further along Finchdean Road.

Mr Berry has a photo taken from the downs above Heberdens Farm showing the railway bridge at Huckswood Lane. It also shows a Lavant flowing from about this point to the arch at the bend in the road where it was thought it always began (that is Postmans Walk).

Ron Stillwell who at the time had lived in the village for over 80 years said it was the worst, that is highest, Lavants he had known.

Peter Kinge confirmed that the Lavants also rose at a point near to the road arch across the railway line at Huckswood Lane. The area is often damp he said.

IT'S ALL HANDS TO THE PUMPS

Firefighters battle to stem flooding in village

Firefighters from across Hampshire were today battling to save a village near Havant from submerging under rising flood waters.

Crews on duty at Finchdean were pumping three million gallons of water an hour out of the village and into fields behind The George public house. Cosham firefighters were last night forced to call in reinforcements as they admitted after four days of continuous pumping they were fighting a losing battle.

Two of the four roads into the village were today closed, with the third under constant threat of closure. The nearby hamlet of Dean Lane End was completely impassable. Sussex, Chichester was facing its worst flooding disaster in more than a century after the river Lavant burst its banks for the third time.

Residents at Finchdean say the flooding is the worst in living memory.

Already at least four homes have been flooded, with householders evacuated as the fire crews pumped water out of living rooms and kitchens.

The quiet village has become like an industrial site as the constant roar of the generators keeps up to 12 pumps flowing.

The Cosham crew is now being aided by firefighters from Horndean, Waterlooville, Havant, Southsea, and Southampton.

They were called out as the situation worsened yesterday with the arrival of yet more rain.

Cosham sub-officer Peter Cannon said: "We're pumping it into a field behind the George -we're filling the field and the ditches up and letting it run away."

But the water is causing more problems in Dean Lane End, which lies below Finchdean. There, residents desperately dug ditches to keep water pouring down the hill from Finchdean away from houses.

A hedge has been bulldozed to allow the flood waters to rush into a field which has now turned into a lake. The road to Finchdean was under almost three feet of water at one point.

Evening News, 10 January 1994

Family's losing battle to clear flooded home

Mother of five, Jan Heatley, aged 41, relives the night Finchdean's floods started – in their cottage kitchen

Mum – I think you'd better come downstairs and see what's happening.

My 18-year-old son, Dan, was sitting on the edge of the bed. It was ten to two in the morning. The kitchen floor was wet and getting wetter by the moment

We got out the wet and dry vacuum cleaner and starting sucking up the water, but as fast as we were sucking it was reappearing.

The front patio was awash with water and one of the drains was blocked. Dan kept emptying the vacuum cleaner outside but the water level carried on rising and the carpet was getting soggy.

Time to phone the fire brigade. My husband Bill laid every towel we possessed in the front room and was wringing them out in the baby's bath. It wasn't making any impression at all

And so it went on throughout the night. Three of us sucking up water in the vacuum, emptying it, mopping up water with towels and putting them in the washing-machine.

All of us had wet feet and we were moving furniture around I looked round at the house before I left and it looked like a disaster area. I knew things would never be the same again, but I didn't even know if I would return there again

Havant council is now paying for Mrs Heatley and her family to stay at the Cleveland Court Hotel at Southsea.

I was devastated. I sat down for the first time since getting out of bed and couldn't take it in. I was shivering from head to foot with cold, weariness and shock

Once I sat down I couldn't even move. I was numb. The firemen lilted the carpet up and you could see water bubbling up through the bare concrete. and putting things on top of tables and chairs.

I was frozen My toes had turned purple and the water continued to rise.

At 9am, after seven hours of non-stop back-breaking slog, the fire chief came back and said: "Forget it – you're fighting a losing battle. You can't save this place."

Then at 1.45pm, we were told we'd have to move out Then the panic really set in. How do you pack enough stuff in an hour for five people, including a two-year-old?

They gave us three locations and I chose a bed and breakfast in Southsea. At

least the children could look upon it as a holiday.

Evening News, 11 January 1994

Touch and go for firefighters

Firefighters today warned they were just holding on as floods engulfed more houses at Finchdean.

More than a dozen homes in the village have now been hit by the worst floods in living memory after waters rose again yesterday.

Builders have knocked holes through the walls of homes to allow water to escape as firefighters pumped water away through the night.

"We're only just holding our own at the moment," said Havant station commander Keith Simmons.

Firefighters faced a fresh crisis yesterday afternoon as 20 minutes of rain sent flood waters surging through the village.

Mr Simmons said: "There wasn't a great deal of rain, but the water table was so high already that it reflooded some houses."

Flood-hit residents praised fellow villagers for helping out as they try and salvage furniture.

Pub landlords in Hambledon were today counting the cost of floods as water gushed through cellars and ruined stock.

Firefighters were today pumping out cellars awash with up to five feet of water in Hambledon as swollen underground springs burst through homes. The village's three pubs were today all throwing out stock ruined by the flooding.

Sailor takes to canoe to find his front door in flood-hit village

Trevor Martin canoed to the front door of his home near the flood-hit village of Finchdean last night. It was the only way to get home.

Residents in Finchdean and the nearby hamlet of Dean Lane End have watched as flood waters rose and the first drops of rain created a torrent of water rushing down roads and fields.

Keen sailor Mr Martin, aged 36, of Dean Lane End cottages, was trying to drive home when he found all roads to the hamlet blocked by deep water.

"The fire service said take the back roads via Idsworth and Compton but I couldn't even get as far as Idsworth the water was so deep," he said.

"I was worried about my house, so I drove 200 yards past the George pub. I had a canoe on the roof of my car so I stuffed it in the water and went woosh."

In Finchdean itself, villagers are trying to adjust to life with the constant

threat of water pouring into their homes. At present there seems no end to their misery in sight.

Landlord of The George, Pete Fletcher, has been dishing up meals almost round the clock

Evening News, 11 January 1994

Builders blamed for flood drains block

Resident claims that old water courses had been obstructed

The floods holding Finchdean under siege were made worse by the effects of extensive building work in the south, according to a local expert.

Fire crews using green goddess fire engines were today still battling against floodwater.

Sandbags were stacked around stricken homes in the community where water levels were still as high as three feet in some places.

Jack Levett, who was a Rowlands Castle parish councillor for 39 years, said builders had filled in natural courses which took away underground water when it spilled on to the surface.

"These are always known locally as the Lavants.

"Because builders have blocked these off in some places to make way for homes, there is nowhere for water to go and it floods."

Mr Levett, who lived at Finchdean for 41 years, said it was three years since the Lavants flowed in Finchdean.

The rise in water levels means there is water flowing past Old Idsworth church where a wooden bridge is always in place - despite the course being empty for much of the year.

Firefighters were today also continuing their struggle at Hambledon to prevent repeat flooding of homes.

At the height of the problems the cellars of 20 village homes were submerged under up to six feet of water.

A spokesman for Hampshire Fire Service said reserve pumps were being brought in, in case of more heavy rain.

"With continuous efforts we are winning the battle," he said.

Evening News, 14 January 1994

Anger as flood helpers may quit village

Angry Finchdean residents today hit out at flood chiefs after they heard relief operations could be withdrawn from the village next week.

East Hampshire councillors and fire chiefs told a public meeting that pumping to clear deluged homes could be withdrawn unless there is more heavy rain.

But Hampshire fire and rescue assistant fire officer, Alan House, assured residents that they would provide help if necessary.

Dozens of villagers packed an emergency meeting at the George public house, Finchdean, wanting to find out how they would cope over the next few weeks.

East Hampshire MP Michael Mates was this afternoon due to visit Finchdean and Fareham MP Peter Lloyd was expected at Hambledon, which has also been badly affected by floods.

Residents worried about rodents being attracted to their damp homes were reassured the council would provide help to eradicate problems.

Insurance experts advised home owners to check insurance policies to find out if they are covered for flood damage caused by a rise in the water table level.

Those whose homes are now drying out were told to get damage assessment and to submit claims as soon as possible.

Mr House said: "If we can help out without escalating operations we will talk to residents and see if there is something simple which can be done."

Homeowners were told blocked ditches, even outside their boundaries, were the householder's responsibility.

Evening News, 22 January 1994

Quackers over floods

FINCHDEAN: Floods were water off a duck's back for customers at the village pub who took the plunge to boost funds for firemen.

A rubber duck race on a flooded field behind The George pub raised £125 for the Firemen's Benevolent Fund to thank them for their efforts in the deluged village.

Landlord Pete Fletcher set up the charity stunt to win back customers to the village which was cut off for almost a week.

One hundred ducks were set off on the cascading temporary river for a prize of a bottle of whisky.

He said: "It has been so quiet - even at this time of year there are usually walkers and mountain bikers coming in, as well as the regular customers coming in for Sunday lunch."

"Even if people did manage to get in, they couldn't get into the car park because the rest of the village was using it to park their vehicles in.

Evening News, 26 January 1994

Clear-up after the mop-up

A major clear-up operation was today on the cards to put flood-hit Finchdean back on dry land.

Plans to restore the waterlogged village follow the withdrawal of firefighters, who have been pumping away the rising waters since the beginning of the month. The long-awaited news will come as a relief to dozens of residents, many of whom were forced to live in upstairs rooms after their homes were deluged by the worst floods for decades.

Pumping operations were continuing at Hambledon today.

Evening News, 24 January 1994

Mates is accused of snub to flood villagers

MP's 15-minute tour attacked

MP Michael Mates was today at the centre of a fresh storm amid claims that he snubbed villagers during a visit to his constituency.

People of flood-hit Finchdean said the East Hampshire MP only found time to speak to fire chiefs and councillors, shunning residents.

Mr Mates made a 15-minute whistle-stop tour on Saturday while about ten miles away Fareham MP Peter Lloyd spent three hours at Hambledon, which has also been disrupted by floods.

Jacquie Fletcher, landlady of the George pub in Finchdean, said: "It's out of order that he should just breeze in and breeze out.

"He's just not interested enough to be involved in the village."

The new controversy comes just days after the former Ulster minister sparked a full-scale emergency by parking illegally outside the House of Commons.

On Saturday Finchdean residents drinking at the George pub, after an emergency public meeting there about the floods, did not even realise their MP had been and gone.

Landlord Peter Fletcher said he was disappointed Mr Mates had not shown more interest in the village.

Among other angry villagers was Kim Wren and her husband Pete, of Gaggen Cottage, and Kay Bowles who were all disappointed at not meeting Mr Mates.

Denying he short-changed his constituents, Mr Mates said: "It wasn't that I was in a hurry.

"I went when I thought I had seen everything there was to see-I spoke to everybody who was there."

He said he had fulfilled the main purpose of the visit which was to make sure everybody was getting the help they needed from the authorities.

Evening News, 24 January 1994

Flood fire fighters set to withdraw

Flood chiefs were today poised to withdraw from Finchdean after three weeks of pumping out millions of gallons of water each day.

Operations commander Alan House said today there was little more the firefighters could do to ease conditions.

"We will certainly be reviewing the situation today. We are getting close to a point where we are not achieving much by what we are doing.

Evening News, 26 January 1994

Flood barricades to come down

Re-opening of road will relieve villagers. Landlord angry over closure costing him hundreds

A road blocked after floods brought chaos to Finchdean was expected to re-open today for the first time in two months.

Dean Lane End was closed and traffic diverted after torrential rain left the road under several inches of water.

But today angry residents said the reopening was long overdue.

Pete Fletcher, landlord of The George at Finchdean, said: "It should have been opened ten days ago – I have lost hundreds of pounds in business in that time.

When we had floods in the past it never took this long for roads to be re-opened."

He believed some would be customers had been put off by the diversion, and headed instead to Compton for a drink.

A woman who lost two friends in a tragic road accident at Finchdean had feared that the road block could cause accidents.

Sheila Proud, of Dean Lane End, said motorists thundering down the narrow stretch of road were unaware that diversions were still in place.

The obstructions were just 100yds from where Carol Martin, aged 39, and Pearl Bishop (50) were killed in 1992.

A spokeswoman for Hampshire county council said: "There is still some water in that area, particularly down that road.

"We have been checking the water levels every day – we will be leaving some sandbags there."

A road near Rowlands Castle, Woodbury Lane, was today still blocked off because of remaining flood water.

Evening News, 7 March 1994

Village welcomes vital flood remedy

MP leads way to prevent future crisis

An action plan spearheaded by MP Michael Mates for vital flood prevention work at Finchdean has been welcomed by residents.

Dozens of homes in the village were hit by the worst floods in living memory during heavy rain in January.

Firefighters worked around the clock for weeks to pump water from deluged homes and roads. Investigations afterwards revealed culverts, storm drains and ditches to carry away rainwater were blocked.

Now, after a meeting organised by the East Hampshire MP, representatives from East Hampshire district and Hampshire county councils, Southern Electric and Rail-track have agreed to carry out improvements by September.

Mr Mates said: "it seemed to me the best thing to do was to get everybody together, sort out what the problems were and get them to agree to put them right

"It will mean if there's another enormous amount of rainfall there will still be water in Finchdean, but it won't be any thing like as bad as before.

"All the various things that caused water not to be able to get away will be put right by September 1."

Resident John Price, aged 70, has lived in the village all his life. He said: "I think Mr Mates has done a good job for us hopefully things will get moving soon.

"It was a terrible time for us, it was unbelievable – we've never had rain like that in the village before. It was so unnecessary – it happened because so many ditches had been filled and culverts blocked."

Evening News, 23 May 1994



Early January and flooded fields below Drews Farm. There is a spring here but this water is mostly coming from the overflow at Dean Lane End. More is coming from where it cannot get through the archway in the Lavants ditch. The stream made another route through the hedge and fields all the way to Rowlands Castle.



Early January at Wick Farm. The Lavants were in the road and at other places in Chalton Road but were to get higher. It rose at this time about 100 yards or so from the bottom of Slant Hill in the fields. Strangely enough there was no water coming from the well at the farm.



9 January, Finchdean bend, call it what you like. Fire engines and pumps were here often, some of this water being the same as was put into the fields at Dean Lane End, but some coming from springs in the gardens along Finchdean Road.



15 January. As can be seen here one of the problems was the fact that the field is higher than the road.



The Lavants running across Woodbury Lane. Early 1900s.



Woodberry Lane early January. The water was above pavement level at times as far as the bend opposite Glendale. The road here did suffer, extra holes were knocked in the wall and the hedge removed, many attempts were made to block the road but the barriers were continually taken down.



9 January. Paul Marshman is walking alongside the wall.



15 January and the hedge has been removed to ease the flow.



Photographs taken from Comley Arch on 15 January. The one above is looking towards Rowlands Castle and shows the flooding caused by the bottleneck under the railway line. There are four lakes here making the arch like an island although there was no water on the road. The one below is looking towards Havant; the flooding continued into the next field, which is usually a bit damp anyway but never such as this and never onto the railway.





The flood was no problem for this 'four legged drive' vehicle. Early 1900s



Dean Lane End. Not only was the water coming over the top of the ditch because of the sharp bend in its course but also because the ditch itself was almost filled in, but it was pouring down the road from Finchdean. Some say the water was two feet deep under the arch at times.



In the Maize Copse fields at the Woodbury Lane End. The flooding was caused by the partial blocking of the ditch where it emerged from the Dell, but it is unlikely that it could have coped with the amount of water anyway. The Lavants had made another route for themselves along the bridle way.



The road to Finchdean just down from where the Lavants entered it, it was the full width of the road and about four inches deep.



Finchdean 16 January. The water coming down the Chalton Road was too much for the ditch and culvert here and was channelled by sandbags between the house and works. Water was also coming through the garden of the house on the left and through the old ironworks development. Some of it had to be pumped away by the fire brigade into the field beyond the George.



Finchdean on 16 January showing some of the vehicles there. Amongst them was a rest room and their own chuck wagon as well as the 'Green Goddesses'.



Finchdean and the spot where the road was blocked causing any traffic that did not make it to detour down Ashcroft Lane.



In the Sling water was coming through here at field level as well as in the ditch. It was also being pumped into there by the fire brigade.



Finchdean looking towards Wick Hanger. The road was still in use although not that much. The only sensible way into the village was down White Hill.



A view at Old Idsworth on 30 January. Early in January there was as much water in the road here as in the field, it flowed down to just about the entrance to the old house. The road from Crook's Corner to the start of Postmans Walk as it always is.



Early January at Woodpeckers, the house between Murrants and Wick, it ran along the road here to the bend where it was mostly in the ditch until Wick Farm.



Dean Lane End, still early January and the car parking spot is flooded. The water flowing down the road was provided with a route into the fields by digging a way through the hedge into them.



Just down from Wick Farm on 16 January, the ditch on the left was full and there was a lot of water in the field also.



16 January. The bend in Finchdean Road between the last two houses. Water from the spring in the field to the left often rises with the Lavants but never that much to flood into the road. There is a spring in the field to the right also but the majority of the flood there comes from the overflowing at Dean Lane End.

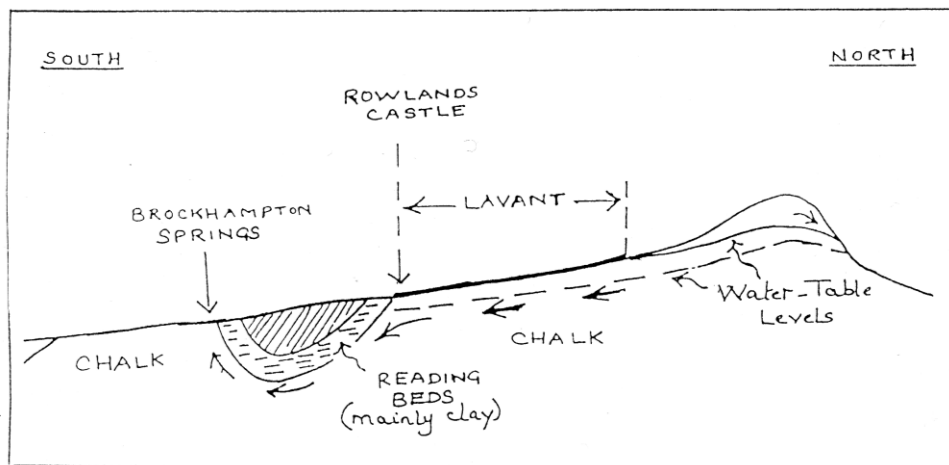


Water crossing the drive at the Sling. The water here is partly from the pumping by the fire brigade.

The Lavant at Rowlands Castle

Peter Mcdowell

Most of you will have seen the recent Lavant flow through Finchdean, Dean Lane End and Rowlands Castle and some of you will have suffered from the associated flooding. A Lavant is the colloquial name used in SE Hants and West Sussex for a stream that flows intermittently in chalkland valleys. The stream is fed primarily by groundwater from the chalk formation when the water-table is above the lowest part of the valley (water-table being defined as the upper surface of the zone of complete saturation). This is only likely to occur after periods of prolonged and heavy winter rainfall because, in the summer months, evaporation reduces groundwater recharge and Portsmouth Water Company extracts more water from the chalk aquifer to meet increased demand.



Diagrammatic Section Through Rowlands Castle.

The diagrammatic cross-section may help to explain some of the factors which determine whether or not the Lavants will "break" and where the stream appears to rise. It indicates the change in level of the water-table, its downward gradient from north to south and the location of Brockhampton Springs. The recent flows were very heavy and the "Finchdean/Rowlands Castle Lavant" could be traced well to the north of St Huberts Chapel at Idsworth. Water was being added to the stream over its whole length down to Rowlands Castle as it crossed the chalk outcrop, forcing its way up through roads, pavements and building foundations in low-lying areas. South of Woodbury Lane, the stream continued to run towards the sea across the Reading Beds formation, which is mainly composed of clays at this location. What the diagram does not show is the large aerial extent of the catchment area and the line of concentrated groundwater flow through Finchdean and Rowlands Castle. Also, it does not explain what is happening above the water-table. Although water from the surrounding hills can move rapidly down through swallow holes and open fissures, vast quantities of water will be percolating slowly down to the water table through the fine-grained chalk material. It is to be expected that the Lavants will continue to run for many days, or even weeks, after the end of the wet weather. Accurate prediction of future Lavant "breaks" is difficult, as there are many contributory factors. A project report produced by Duncan Brewer of Bowes Hill, when the "Finchdean/Rowlands Castle Lavant" last "broke" in February 1988, includes

some useful information on the recent history of this particular Lavant.

There were, apparently, seven events of varying intensity between 1956 and 1977 at intervals from two to five years. Since 1977, there has been a very slight "break" in 1984 and the very heavy events of 1988 and 1994. The longer intervals can be explained by the increase in water extraction from the chalk over this period due to increased urbanisation in SE Hants. Perhaps it is fortunate that the dry summer of last year further depressed the water-table in the chalk locally to counteract the effects of the subsequent prolonged period of exceptionally heavy rainfall.

(Peter McDowell was formerly Principal Lecturer in Engineering Geology at the University of Portsmouth.)

Scheme to beat flood repeat is priced at £50,000

Watercourse clearance scheme

Councillors are mulling over a £50,000 scheme to combat the kind of floods which ravaged Finchdean and Rowlands Castle earlier this year.

A report by chief officers at East Hampshire district council aimed at overcoming future flooding calls for natural water courses between the two villages to be cleared,

Members of the council's environment committee will be told on Wednesday that the bill for the work could top £50,000.

Councillors are also being urged to approve annual council maintenance checks.

The flooding which hit the area in January was blamed on the Lavant stream which runs between Finchdean and Rowlands Castle. It cost Hampshire County Council close on £250,000.

The report says: "This is a natural phenomenon which cannot be prevented.

"The extent of future flooding can be considerably reduced if the existing ditches and pipes in the area are cleared and maintained on a regular basis and blocked water courses are reinstated."

The report points out that the flooding was on a scale not seen in recent years and it was understood to have happened on only two or three occasions this century.

"If no action had been taken it is believed approximately 12 properties

would have flooded in Finchdean with a further six at Dean Lane End and the Finchdean Lane area of Rowlands Castle. "At one stage the fire appliances alone were pumping more than 2,700 litres a second using 50 men working 24 hour shifts." One problem was overflowing septic tanks and cesspools.

Evening News, 18 July 1994

FLOOD VILLAGE ACTION STARTS

Relieved Finchdean residents today welcomed action to prevent a repeat of the worst floods in living memory.

After a nine-month campaign for action, a £50,000 scheme to combat future flooding in the village is set to start. East Hampshire has pledged the bulk of the money, but is now looking for contributions from landowners including Hampshire County Council and Railtrack.

Work is due to start next month after numerous pleas for action, spearheaded by MP Michael Mates. Dozens of homes in the village are still undergoing repair after they were ravaged by floods during heavy rain in January.

Investigations afterwards revealed culverts, storm drains and ditches to carry away water were blocked. East Hampshire principal engineer Keith Robinson said councillors would discuss the final funding at a committee meeting on August 31.

He said: "The £50,000 we have agreed to spend can't all come from the district council as a lot of the work is not down to us. The flooding was a natural disaster and is not anyone's fault, but someone needed to co-ordinate the operation which is where East Hampshire stepped in. If we get the same heavy rain which caused the flooding in January again then Finchdean is likely to flood again.

"But the measures we are proposing will mean that it won't flood so quickly or heavily or for so long. We will be able to keep it under control."

Resident John Price, aged 70, who has lived in the village for all his life welcomed the start of the work. He said: "It looks as if everything is moving now that they have agreed to spend the money."

The flooding which hit the area was blamed on the Lavant stream which runs between Finchdean and Rowlands Castle.

Evening News, 19 August 1994

Pay up for repairs to road yourselves

Residents given county ultimatum

Residents of a private Finchdean road badly damaged by vehicles during last winter's floods will have to pay for repairs themselves.

Hampshire County Council chiefs want neighbours to cover the cost of upgrading Ashcroft Lane before the council will formally adopt it – with the bill likely to top £40,000. The road was the only route into the village during the floods in January. Residents say Hampshire should foot the bill because it diverted traffic along the private lane.

But in a letter to Rowlands Castle Parish Council, East Hampshire Council engineering chief Haydn Smith said the county would not adopt the road unless residents paid for the repairs.

The alternative was to block off the road and allow access only to residents and emergency vehicles, he said. But some basic repairs would still be needed, and although East Hampshire and Hampshire councils could contribute, neighbours would still have to cover part of the cost.

Disgusted resident Bill Baker said that was not good enough.

"I've lived here 30 years and it only got this bad when they diverted the traffic down it," he said today.

The road will be discussed at a special meeting on October 13 to draw up a plan of action to prevent a repeat of January's flooding which deluged Finchdean for three weeks.

Evening News, 5 October 1994

Railtrack may hold on to flood work cash

Cash-strapped Railtrack South West cannot afford to finance flood prevention work at Finchdean because of tough cash limits imposed since the marathon rail strike.

The company responsible for stations, track, and signalling was paying South West Trains up to £500,000 in compensation for each day its services were stopped from running by striking signal staff.

Railtrack chiefs spent millions of pounds covering the cost of the 16-week dispute which ended this month.

And a subsequent belt-tightening drive has jeopardised the flood prevention plans.

The company was due to contribute to a £50,000 ditch-clearing scheme to prevent a repeat of January's disastrous flooding in the village.

But it will tell residents, council engineers and landowners at a meeting tomorrow that financial restrictions imposed since the strike mean it may not be able to shell out.

East Hampshire engineers, who want to co-ordinate a joint scheme, accused Railtrack of evading their responsibilities to clear ditches next to the railway line at Finchdean.

Railtrack South West spokeswoman Jenny Rawlinson said: "Our financial restrictions mean that this may be something that is best dealt with by another authority."

Evening News, 12 October 1994

Surveys reveal flooding blackspots

East Hampshire Residents demand urgent action

Councillors are to consider spending money tackling flooding blackspots in East Hampshire after calls for urgent work to be done.

Redhill Road and Durrants Road at Rowlands Castle and Horndean's The Coppice are top of a list of priority areas where officers believe emergency work is needed.

Now East Hampshire Council's environment committee could ask for money to be switched from other schemes for emergency maintenance.

Officers have also identified eight other flood-hit parts of Horndean where further investigation is needed.

Principal engineer Keith Robinson said questionnaires returned by residents confirmed their fears about areas of serious flooding.

He said: "They are now on a priority list and work will be done if the funding becomes available, or if the committee decides to take money from something else."

East Hampshire Council will co-ordinate with other bodies including the county council and Southern Water before carrying out any other work.

The environment committee will decide how to budget for the work on Thursday.

Evening News, 6 December 1994

VILLAGES FACE FLOOD BURDEN

Cash-strapped fire crews will only act in emergency

Flood-hit villagers in Hambledon and Rowlands Castle were today left reeling as fire chiefs admitted they had no cash to help.

Dozens of residents face shelling out for their own pumps to clear water seeping into homes as fears grow of another flooding nightmare.

Fire crews who spent days pumping water out of homes and roads in a £250,000 operation last year have been told they can't afford to get involved again.

Hampshire County Council leader Cllr Mike Hancock today urged residents to deal with the problem themselves.

He said there was no budget to pay for the £8,000-a-day pumping operation.

Although the fire service, which is allocated cash by the county council, will act in an emergency, it would mean money being taken from budgets such as education or social services.

The move came as floods today swamped roads and fields in Rowlands Castle end as Hambledon villagers reported water rising in their cellars.

Cllr Hancock said: "Hampshire County Council has no statutory responsibility to pump out flood-water, and neither does the fire brigade.

"We can't have any long-term pumping exercise when we haven't got the money to pay for it.

"We want to do everything possible to make sure that it doesn't happen again, but my advice is for residents to contact their own insurance companies to arrange cover."

But Hambledon pub landlord Phil Harris, of the New Inn, said: "My cellar is four feet deep in water at the moment, and I've been pumping out 2,000 gallons an hour since Friday.

"I'm paying for that myself, because it costs less than claiming on my insurance and losing my no-claims bonus.

"As fast as I pump it, it is rising, and if it gets much worse my stock will be underwater and I will have to close. If that's not an emergency, I don't know what is."

Hambledon residents were today receiving advice from engineers at

Winchester City Council asking them to install their own pumps.

Its letter tells them not to pump their cellars dry, because the pressure of water could mean cellar walls caving in, and not to use electrical equipment that is wet.

Hampshire fire and rescue service spokesman Mick Johns said: "We are working with district councils to ensure we don't get called out to minor flooding.

"The problem is that if we start pumping, we don't know how long we will be there, and we don't have the funding for a long-term operation.

"But if there is an emergency where there is risk of injury, we will be there."

Meanwhile, road-users in Rowlands Castle today faced up to a foot of water on Woodbury Lane and Finchdean Road.

Evening News, 8 February 1995

Stream is studied

Flood prevention survey

Water watchdogs today unveiled a major survey to find the cause of flooding at Rowlands Castle and Finchdean.

Villagers called for an improved flow of water from the Lavant stream running into Havant, after floods struck Finchdean homes in the last two Januarys.

Now the National Rivers Authority has announced a study of the stream's upper catchment area over the next two months.

Rowlands Castle Parish Council chairman Cllr Peter Desmond welcomed the move and said he hoped it would bring action from public bodies.

He said: 'The highway authority may have to lower a road or the drainage authority may have to deepen ditches, or clear them, or dig new ones.

'Until they have detailed evidence of where the water comes from, and how it flows, they are justifiably reluctant to spend public money.'

Cllr Desmond said ditches filled with silt over the summer needed to be cleared.

And he warned that underground spring water could still pose a problem.

National Rivers Authority spokesman Ray Kemp said: 'We would hope that any conclusions that are reached should be ready by early next year.'

Evening News, 12 August 1995

MAROONED BY FLOOD WATER

Traffic diverted as main road through village submerged

Finchdean residents were today bracing themselves for another night of torrential rain after the village became marooned by flood water.

Traffic was diverted through Rowlands Castle as the main road through the village became submerged under one foot of water.

But a £50,000 ditch-clearing programme by East Hampshire District Council meant most properties escaped the full onslaught of a rising water table.

Engineers were in the village today to check for damage to homes but the main problems seemed to be on the roads.

Project engineer John Elson said the first phase of flood prevention works in the village seemed to have been a success.

"We are still monitoring the situation but the works we have carried out over the last few months seemed to have prevented many of the properties being hooded," he said. "Some homes have had springs coming up through their floors but there is no torrent of water raging through the village."

The high water table meant residents were today unable to use their toilets and washing-machines.

Sue Thatcher, of Finchdean Road, said: "For the second time in 18 days we have had to pay out £50 to have our septic tank emptied.

"We are slightly higher up and are fortunately not too badly affected but some of the lower houses are surrounded by a moat.

"For us to be living in medieval conditions in 1995 is ridiculous."

A flood action committee set up by East Hampshire put pressure on Railtrack to clear its culvert south of the railway line.

"The work by Railtrack is one of the main reasons why the flooding this year's hasn't been so bad," said Mr Elson.

Weather experts at Southampton Weather Centre said they were expecting another half inch of rain later today.

A spokesman said there would be scattered showers tomorrow and more heavy rain on late Wednesday afternoon.

Evening News, 20 February 1995

The Lavants 2000-2001 – Paul Marshman

We must I think consider some earlier events. Whether rainfall had been more than usual in the early part of the year I know not but on Friday September 15th there was very heavy rain over the village. It started about 9.30am and was heavy and consistent until 1.30pm.

The water accumulated at the bottom of Bowes Hill and the right hand arch was flooded making a huge puddle there, outside the shop and across the pavement and into Woodberry Lane. It made a continuous 'lake' joining up with the land opposite the Castle Inn. The water made its escape down Finchdean road in a wide and fast flowing torrent.

There was water on the Green, coming from the road and the footpaths across it. There was a torrent of water both sides of the road to the south of the Green. (Now this event happens more often, but once only the gulley nearest the wall used to fill up, it would appear that a re-alignment has taken place.)

At the Chapel there was a huge puddle caused in part by the runoff down the Keyline road and at College Close the water was very deep where the swallow hole had overflowed. Soon after the rain stopped the Police closed the road from the Chapel to Castle Road, mostly perhaps because of the wash from motorists for the water from College Close to the Chapel was pretty much across the whole width of the road.

I had never seen water lying on the Green before (say 40 years) I had noticed that water did come down from Keyline after any rain at all and the Swallow Hole had been known to overflow before.

The water was deep enough and strong enough to carry a cone put at the Chapel by the police the whole length of the road from there to Winnicotts shop, at a good walking pace.

Monday October 30th. Heavy rain again and at 7.10am as I rode to work there was water streaming down Bowes Hill and at the arches the water was half way across the road and over the pavement outside the shop. At the Green the water was like a river, the whole width of the road from there to College Close and from kerb to kerb, that is about 4 inches deep at least. Deep enough to force me onto the pavement where there was water also. All this was coming from Keyline and an overflowing swallow hole. I rode up College Close as water was too deep there to go on up Redhill Road. Down the Drift there was a lot of water coming from the various old ditches there and from Oaklands. There were sheets of water in other low lying bits also from there to New Lane. On the way home there was a

pumping lorry at College Close (say 5.20pm) and the road was passable there.

Sunday November 5th. Rained hard from about 2.45pm just as forecasted, in fact many had cancelled Guy Fawkes bonfires. That night at 10.00pm or so water was half way across road at the Arches again and flowing down road on South side of Green. There was a sheet of water opposite the Castle, just as before. It rained more during the night. In the morning, at about 7.05am, the road from the arches to the chapel was still flooded but not so bad as the week before. There was a lot of water again at College Close and once more I had to cycle up that road and down the Drift. This was the swallow hole overflowing again. There was a lot of surface water in the Drift again, coming down from Oaklands. That evening on the way home there was still enough water at College Close to make me go back and up the Drift to get round it. The pumping lorry was not there this time so it must have made a difference. There was water along the bottom side of the Green, at the chapel and at the Arches. Another feature of this rain and even quite minor storms since is water at the Staunton Arms from Redhill Road. It appears to come across the old school playground, in its turn from the fields leading to Oaklands. Also for the first time I can remember there has been standing water in my garden in Uplands Road. I was informed at about this time that the water level was at its highest since 1994.

Everybody thought the Lavants would be up early and they were. News came of the rising at Crook's Corner on the 7/8th November and by Thursday 9th they were across Woodberry Lane but not at Finchdean Road corner. They were at this place by Saturday and deep enough for the Police to put up a warning sign. Dean Lane End was apparently flooded by then with water under the railway arch. Sunday 12th November I rode to top of White Mill and Black Rabbit Field was flooded as in 1994 and you could hear the water flowing into the road from where I stood on the Hanger. I rode to Slanthill and a stream was coming from Netherley Farm down the road and into the field and out again into Wick Lane but not as much as in 1994. At Woodberry Lane it was deep and wide and the fields in Maize Coppice were well flooded. At Comley arch there was masses of water, more than in 1994 in my opinion, with a lot more on the railway line although that could be because there was a new pipe culvert allowing water to flow from the field onto the line.

Friday 17th November the water at Finchdean Road bend had all but gone but at Woodberry Lane the road was cordoned off with barriers and sand bags. By the 18th November a sign had been erected at the arches saying the road was closed and there was another erected as a diversion had to be made to an event

at Stansted.

Sunday 19th November, at Comley arch there seemed to be more water than before with more on the railway line also, it looked like a second drain had been cut in from the field. The water was across and over the bridal path. At Slant Hill however looking down into the valley, there was little evidence of a stream at all, just a few isolated small pools in the field.

Sunday 26th November, water was still coming from springs along Finchdean Road, the ditch there being quite full but there was only a puddle or so at the bend. There was lots of water both sides of the road at Courtlands and the field in front of Drews Farm (at Knights Hill). Water was still under the arch at Dean Lane End but not flowing down the road, but it must have been as the hedge and verge had been gouged out (mechanically) as in 1994. Water was level with top of ditch at Dean Lane End.

December. The Lavants did seem to go down a little and early in the month it was possible to cycle along Finchdean Road to Dean Lane End.

December 10th. Water at Finchdean bend bad again and soon it was deep enough there to flow into Stansted Park and there was a gushing stream from there across to Woodberry Lane as well as the normal Lavant Stream. It flowed down Finchdean road from the fields there. Also across the drive as in 1994 of course. In Woodberry Lane it was up to Glendale where it flowed into Maize Coppice by the bridal way gate and along that path as another stream. In the fields there it had soon bypassed the dell.

December 11th & 12th. Rained for another two days. On Tuesday the cellar of the Castle Inn was being pumped out. By December 13th the bridge in Crossland Drive in Leigh Park overflowed and Crossland Drive was shut to traffic. Some thought this was an underground river coming up and they could be right. On Friday the stream at the bridge in that road was still very near the top and on the Havant side had burst its bank. The water in Crossland Drive however was some thirty yards from the bridge and appeared to be free standing.

December 16th. I had a chance to see the stream at Solent Road, Havant, and it was little deeper than normal, there must be a blockage in Havant somewhere.

That afternoon I looked at Woodberry Lane and there was a warning notice about the wall being unsafe and against wading in the water; because of its depth as well as its strong flow I would imagine.

The water had got into Glendale and the garden of the first house on the left was flooded (the residents had apparently moved furniture upstairs etc). There was water the other side of the stepping stone and the pavement from there to

the footbridge (Woodberry Lane) was completely under water. (Worse in my opinion than in 1994.) In Finchdean Road bend the water as still pouring into Stansted and the house on the bend had water up to its front door. The cellar of the Castle Inn was still being pumped out.

December 17th. Rode up to Slant Hill and the Lavants was now a full stream from Netherley Farm as in 1994. At Finchdean water was coming down from Wick and across the green there completely overflowing the ditch. Mr Price said water was up to his house earlier in the week and was now kept back by sandbags. Water was across the Idsworth Road by the blacksmiths and about 8 inches deep in the middle and all the houses in the foundry had pumps operating. Black Rabbit field was almost covered by water, which was overflowing into the road and down to the arch at Dean Lane End, possibly worse than in 1994. In Woodberry Lane water was still in Glendale but mostly standing and over the wall into Stansted there was water again. It was across the drive as before and in 1994 (maybe worse) the two streams meeting in the Sling. Water was still over the pavement from the stepping stone to the bridge. At Finchdean bend it was the same as before but water was now up to the Mays house and in the road was probably a foot deep and flowing fast into Stansted. The water was coming off the corner of the field despite sand-bags there. It is likely that the whole of the area over the wall here was under water. Most of the houses in this first part of Finchdean Road had water in their gardens and pumps in operation. Further along it was a bit drier with only about 9 inches of water in the ditch but after the footpath by number 79 the water was in and across the road again, more pumps were in operation and the ditch was full to the top. There was water at the corner by the railway side in the field, as in 1994 but not so much in the road itself. The fields on the Lavants side were nearly completely covered with a good flow of water through them as well as the stream itself. Water was across the footpath into Stansted as in 1994, possible a bit wider. At Dean Lane End water was again flowing down the road from the arch and beyond and straight out into the fields there through the dug out course (probably the same stream that crosses the footpath above and down into Finchdean Road at the wall around Stansted). The road was closed here that implies at times cars etc. could get this far from Rowlands Castle. At Comley Arch there was more water than ever and a stream was cutting across the bridal path in a wide circle to a spot where the road climbs up again towards Emsworth. It was flowing here at a good rate through the small arch and into the left hand pond overflowing into the field. The other side was flooded as in previous weeks.

It looked as if some work had been done on the railway as fresh earth was piled up into banks. The flooded fields went on towards Havant and on the line itself there was more water than before, and at one point it was flowing back into the right hand pond.

Monday 18th December. Went to Havant by train and water in Maize Coppice fields was in full flood including ponds appearing in the Three Fields and at the point where the Lavants goes under the line it was very near the line indeed. Towards Havant there was a lot of still water in Southleigh woods, just about by sight on a level with the track.

Christmas Day, Boxing Day. Water still pouring into Stansted at the hole in the wall but not quite so much. Water has gone from garden in Glendale and is only just making it to the gate into Maize Coppice, the large overflow pond at Comley arch had gone.

December 27th, a Wednesday, rode to Slant Hill water was still in fields but looked free standing, no water in road at Netherley but large holes in road and humps showed where it had been. I had heard of water at Woodcroft and found two large ponds there plus evidence of water having been in the road to the farm. The ponds were probably connected at the height of the flood. A third pond was of brackish water and is most likely the old pond belonging to the farm. These ponds looked to be to be flood water from the fields more than spring water. There is no sign of a culvert or bridge at this point for any Lavant Stream as there is in all the other places along the route of both the stream and the railway(the railway company being responsible for bridges both over and under). From the railway bridge there the Lavant Stream did seem to start from a point nearer to the viewer than in 1994. Water was in full flow along the road down to Crook's Corner, the usual course for the Lavants but deeper than usual as well. Water was in flow along the road from Wick Farm to Finchdean. At Finchdean road bend you could now get by as there was only a large puddle there but water was still in the gardens here and in the road where the wall ends, what stream there was was going down the drains and not into Stansted, Water was shallower at Woodberry Lane but still a good flow in the centre, the road was still blocked off.

December 31st, rained torrents from 2.30pm till 10.30pm or later. I walked to the Fountain Inn at about 10.05pm and water coming down Bowes Hill was deep enough to go over shoes. All the driveways into properties in Uplands Road had water gushing out of them and into the road. The water was piled up at the Arches and outside the shop and there were large puddles in the road and

pavement along the Green. At 2.00pm the next day the swallow hole was still full and overflowing into College Close. Water was deeper at Finchdean Road bend but not in the gardens.

January 2001, Lavants flowed all month.

February, went down at one time but heavy rain in the middle of the month meant it rose a bit. The road at Crook's Corner was at one time nearly dry and the road under the arch at Dean Lane End was passable by push bike with no trouble on January 27th but half way across the road again by February 24th.

Monday March 19th, rode up to Woodberry Lane that evening and the steam was just a 3 inch deep trickle. The road was completely cut off to traffic by two sets of barriers and the road itself completely "dug up" by the action of the water.

March 22nd/23rd, heavy rain overnight on both days. Swallow hole full to the top again and just breaking out into the road. More rain the next week on the 26th and 27th and the swallow hole was full again until the 29th. On that day I went to Woodberry Lane and the Lavants was back in a normal full flow as it was at Dean Lane End about 2/3rds up the ditch.

April, week ending 7th, more rain and the Lavants were higher than a week ago.

Friday April 13th, Woodberry Lane the Lavants were flowing as normal and out into Maize Coppice in the channel. There was water in the fields along Finchdean Road but not in the road till I got beyond No. 83 and then only a little. There was still water in the field to the left at the corner and water to the right at Drews Farm. It did not appear to be flowing across the path into Stansted. At Dean Lane End it was about 2/3rds up the ditch but the house nearest the bridge had two pumps with water gushing into the stream. There was a bit of water under the bridge and in Black Rabbit field but no great stream beyond it. Water was still being pumped out of the Old Foundry and a trickle from Carpenters, Water was in road at Ashcroft Lane mostly coming from possibly a pump at the electricity sub-station there. A small amount under Finchdean arch and water at Crook's Corner but not a lot. There was no water along Wick except a small amount of static water in the ditch. From Slant Hill the fields could be seen to be newly ploughed with no trace of the Lavants at all, however, a field nearer to Netherley that was grass had a easily noticeable swathe across it.

Engineer hired to end street's floods

A GROUP of Rowlands Castle residents have employed an engineering consultant

to find a way to beat the floods which threaten their homes.

Five households in Redhill Road have placed sandbags at the end of their drives to prevent water pouring on to their properties.

The danger of floods has been a problem in the street since 1993 but reached its worst point during November's downpours.

Water levels have receded recently, but residents fear they could strike again.

Now the families want to raise the edge of the pavements outside their homes to act as a permanent barrier to the water.

East Hampshire District Council, with the aid of the Environment Agency and Hampshire County Council, is to examine the proposal and inspect flood-affected areas to work out what can be done to prevent future flooding.

During last month's problems, chemical toilets were taken to some houses in the area after water flooded drains and made facilities unusable.

Philip Morris, resident of Redhill Road, believes the flooding has come as a result of water running down from the new nearby Charles Church housing estate.

And he fears plans for more housing in the area could cause further problems by increasing the burden on underground streams.

He said; 'This isn't a natural problem - that I could accept - but this seems to have been caused by incorrect surveying which means water from the Charles Church estate ends up in an underground swallow hole.

'This overfills and causes a river 1ft deep to run down our road and we have had no help from the local authorities in sorting this out.'

East Hants councillor David Clegg (Lib. Dem, Rowlands Castle) said: 'The council learned from the experiences of floods in 1994 and the problems haven't been as bad as back then.

'But we are looking at the longer term situation with consultants from the Environment Agency to see if something can be done if this going to occur with increasing frequency.'

The council is due to meet again in January to discuss a report on the impact of November's floods and possible solutions.

Extra signs urged to warn drivers

Rowlands Castle Parish Council has emergency plans to place extra signs in Finchdean Road to warn motorists when the road becomes blocked by floods.

The organisation felt signs used during November gave drivers inadequate notice of the blocked road. At times, Finchdean Road became flooded underneath

the railway bridge in the village and further along the country lane.

Clerk to the council Francesca Wade-Palmer said: 'It is looking likely the road is going to be flooded again so hopefully these signs will give motorists better warning. People were going along but when they got to the end of the lane they found they couldn't get into Finchdean village.'

Evening News, 7 December 2000

Church may be forced to cancel its Christmas



A CHURCH is set to cancel its Christmas services as a hamlet struggles to cope with devastating floods.

St Hubert's Church of Idsworth, on the outskirts of Finchdean, has decided not to hold services this weekend because it is completely isolated by water.

The Revd Dr Trevor Reader said a decision was due on Tuesday on whether traditional Christmas services including the midnight candlelit service would have to be cancelled. Mr Reader said: 'Our nine lessons and carol service this Sunday will have to be cancelled because we cannot get through by car. It is probably only possible with waders. It will be a real shame if we have to cancel the Christmas services.'

There has been an awful lot of work with the choir rehearsing, and the church was going to be decorated today, but that's been delayed.'

Heavy rain in the past week has waterlogged Finchdean and caused whole areas to be cut off through roads being blocked by water standing several feet deep.

Three of the four roads into the village are blocked by floods, leaving a back road to Rowlands Castle as the only exit from the village. The Dean Lane End area of the hamlet has become isolated from the rest of the hamlet by the flooded roads.

The floods have ripped through people's homes with dire consequences.

Water stands 18 inches deep in a number of homes while several other households are having to resort to chemical toilets while the water systems have

failed. But despite water flowing everywhere, none is coming through the taps of most houses.

Some residents have been told to move out by their insurance companies while a few homes have become completely cut off.

Sara Younghusband, 28, of Strickle Cottage in the old Iron foundry, said: 'You have to wear wellies to get to our house after three dormant springs under our house, which we didn't even know we had, sprung into life. We're just slowly watching our homes being destroyed.'

Despite the hardships of having no water and living solely in the upstairs rooms, the hardy souls of Finchdean have managed to keep their sense of humour - well for the moment at least

Brian Worth, 57, landlord at The George pub, still open and a haven for people needing the still-operating toilets, said: 'The atmosphere here is reminiscent of the blitz.'

Roger and Libby Guest of Finchdean Farm have helped by offering bedrooms to ousted residents at their house-turned-Noah's ark. Roger, 58, said: 'The village atmosphere is so friendly, we know everyone now and everyone is being helpful.'

Residents have praised firefighters, especially those from Horndean and Havant, who have visited every home to help lug furniture around and make sure everyone was safe.

Evening News, 16 December 2000

You can have your kayak and 'street' it

A wet winter may have been a pain for most people but for one person it has been an absolute treat.

Keen kayaker Neil Atkinson has been enjoying the rare opportunity to paddle in an unusual place – the middle of a road.

Mr Atkinson is just one of a number of people who made the most of the Lavant River in recent days.

The river, fed by springs, occasionally overflows over Woodberry Lane, Rowlands Castle, when the water table is high. But that hasn't happened in years.

So Mr Atkinson, of Whitehaven, Horndean, took to the water – and sent this photo, above, to show us his escapade.

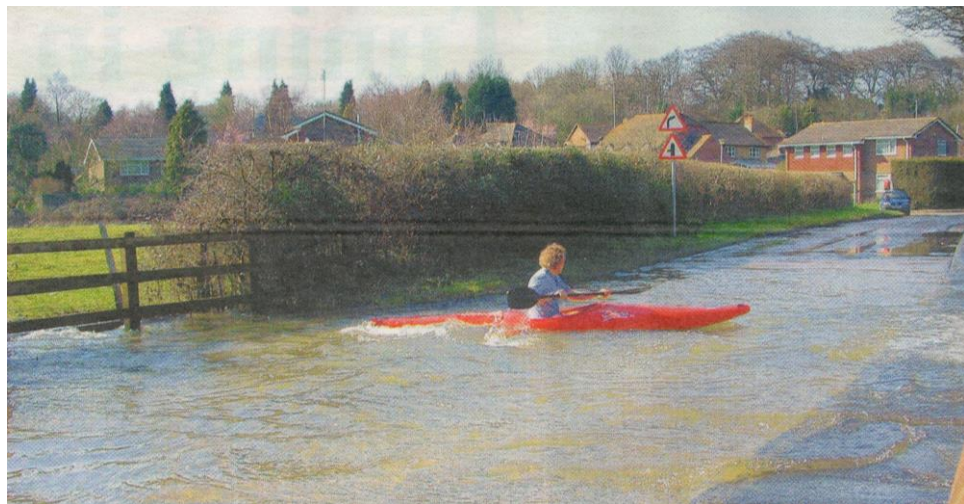
He said: 'I have only ever seen water in the ford three times in about 10 years.

'I took the opportunity to take a few photos and, being a keen kayaker, I also took the opportunity for a paddle.'

But the 49-year-old said he wouldn't advise paddling in the road as a general rule.

He said: 'You could get run over, and I wouldn't recommend it.

'But I'm quite an experienced paddler, and I had a friend there making sure there was no traffic coming.'



Kayaker Neil Atkinson has been enjoying his hobby in the middle of the road.

He said the water was running quite fast, and it took a lot of skill to control his kayak.

Mr Atkinson, an electrician, said it is the first time he has used his kayak in the road, and said it was great fun.

'We were going to go paddling anyway down at Dell Quay so we just stopped for five minutes when we saw the ford had come up,' he said.

Rowlands Castle councillor Marjorie Harvey said people have always enjoyed playing in the ford. 'It only comes up about every few years,' she said. 'It's in full flow now.' 'It's a bit of a unique feature for Rowlands Castle. I was born here and I used to play in there as a child.' 'It used to come up more often but now it only happens about every seven years.'

She lives close to the ford, and she saw Mr Atkinson paddling in it and thought it was very funny.

'Everyone comes down and plays in it when it comes up. I like it. It's really quite nice. The children were out there with little canoes having a laugh.'

Evening News, 2007

Flooding hits Rowlands Castle and surrounds

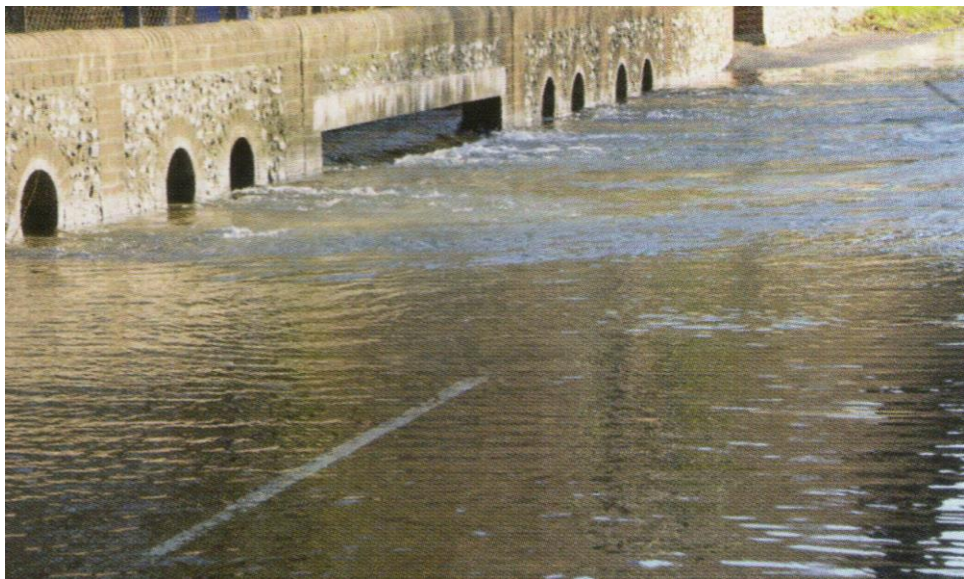
2013

by Kevin Connell

It has been one of the wettest years on record and Rowlands Castle and surrounding areas have not escaped the consequences. We are fortunate that the Parish Council had been proactive in developing its emergency response team. Indeed local MP George Hollingberry was full of praise citing the arrangements as best practice. At the time of writing Woodberry Lane is still closed due to the high level of water in the Lavant passing across the ford. Below is a selection of photographs of flooding in the local area taken by Photography Club members Steve Radcliffe, Fiona Charlesworth and Pat Carter.

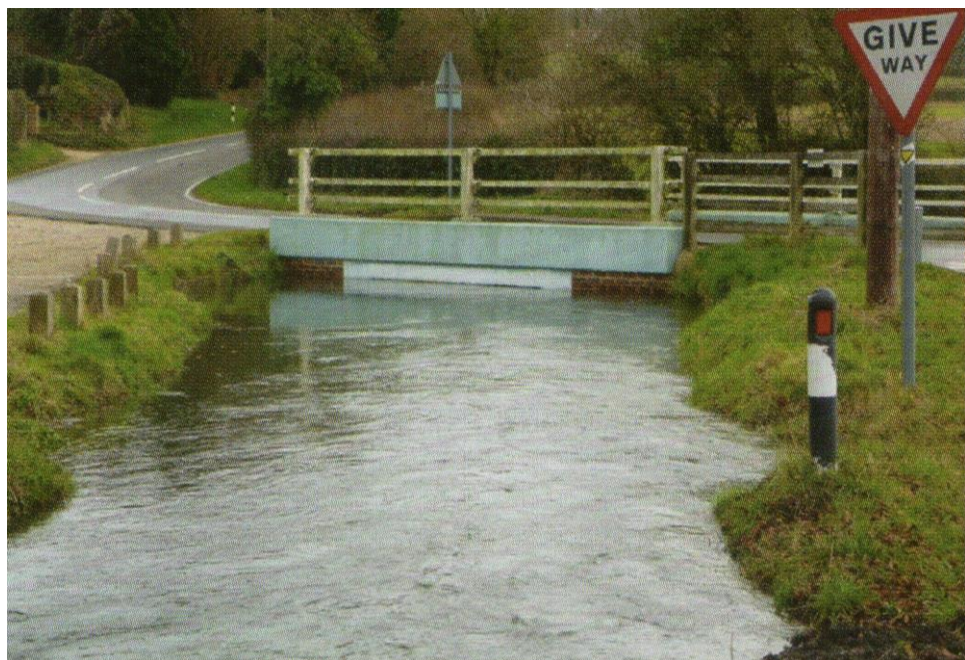


St Hubert's Church – the permanent bridge



Woodberry Lane, the ford and footbridge, looking towards Westbourne





Dean Lane End. The new bridge. The road to Forestside goes up to the left.



Just the other side of the railway arch between Finchdean and Old Idsworth. The field beyond was the old cricket pitch.



Crook's Corner. St Hubert's Church is hidden behind the trees to the left.



Dean Lane End. The ditch and overflow from the fields towards Finchdean on the other side of the arch. The water being pumped the houses (possibly an old well) to the right.

Villagers make plans for last-ditch defence to protect homes from more flooding

Residents are ready to battle with floodwater

SEVEN HUNDRED sandbags have been delivered in a desperate bid to keep flood waters from the doors of dozens of homes.

Streets in Finchdean and Rowlands Castle are already nearly 2ins deep in water and residents living there fear any more downpours could bring the levels up to their doors.

In an effort to protect some of those most at risk East Hampshire District Council has handed out 700 sandbags.

And it has even set up five portable toilets in case the cesspits fill up with water so residents can no longer use their own.

Both villages were devastated by flooding two years ago with people living there having to fork out thousands of pounds to repair their homes.

fa an attempt to stop a repeat, Rowlands Castle Parish Council drew up a flood plan to help co-ordinate their response to floods.

The parish council appointed a number of flood wardens who keep residents informed of water levels and any risk of flooding.

The wardens then report back to the parish council who contact other agencies, such as the district council, to ask for help and items like sandbags. Parish council clerk Steve Protheroe said: 'Both the local rivers near here have risen, but the measures in our flood plan are working so at the moment we have no houses flooded.

The flood plan means we have been able to get ahead of the game - although the weather is meant to be dry this week we are well prepared for more rain.

With the current dry spell, water levels are expected to continue to rise before levelling off – but even a few days of heavy rain could put homes back at risk.

Finchdean resident Alex Finch, 48, said: Two years ago the flooding was terrible and left the whole village devastated – it is a real worry for everyone.

The flood plan has been successful so far because we have a clear channel of communication to and from the council rather than lots of phone calls from lots of different people.



Photograph taken from the centre of Finchdean looking up the Chalton Lane (sometimes known as South Lane) in January 2014.

No-one wants a repeat of October 2000 misery

The people of Finchdean are petrified every time it rains in case it leads to a repeat of the floods of October 2000.

Residents reported that water was building up through sinks and toilets making them unusable.

Heavy rain caused cellars to flood and gardens to turn into rivers and whole areas were cut off after roads were blocked by standing water several feet deep.

Many had to leave their homes for months while repairs were carried out. East Hampshire District Council and Rowlands Castle Parish Council have drawn up separate plans to ensure everyone knows who is responsible for what if there is a flood.

Evening News, 8 January 2003

2000/1 Aftermath

Andy Lee – Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group

The calendar year of 2000 saw the heaviest rainfall in Havant since Portsmouth Water Company records began in 1886 with 1175mm falling in the full year – but the 5 months September 2000 to January 2001 inclusive saw 839mm, more than the total annual rainfall in 1999 or 2001.

The previous high occurred in 1960 (1162mm). Between 1961 and 1999 there were just 3 years when annual rainfall exceeded 900mm being 1974, 1993 and 1994. Since 2000, there have been 3 years when rainfall exceeded 900mm being 2002 (912mm), 2012 (1088mm) and 2014 (993mm), all years when the lavants flowed.

In the aftermath of the 2000/1 flooding, there was a lot of concern that the lavant water course could not cope with the higher volumes of water associated with more extreme and persistent rainfall levels. At Government level, The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) issued a directive that all councils carry out flood risk and flood defence assessments leading East Hampshire District Council to produce an Operational Flood Plan which highlighted the importance of drainage system and watercourse maintenance together with ensuring that new property development took proper account of potential flooding risks – both surface and groundwater.

Locally the Environment Agency commissioned the Halcrow Group to produce a report on the winter flooding of 2000/1. A draft was published for local consultation in December 2001. Included in the report were recommendations that:

- The Agency improve their flood warning system to allow for suitable preparations to be made in advance of possible flooding.
- Regular maintenance be stepped up of the water course drainage and ditch systems.
- Improvements to the infrastructure be made – including an enlarged culvert in Finchdean and bigger drainage channels to increase water flow both in Finchdean and Dean Lane End.

- Guidance be given to property owners on the benefits of installing ground water pumping solutions where there was the possibility of flooding.
- Designating the watercourse as a “main river” from the source of the lavants to Havant where the Lavant Stream was already classified as a main river.

The report set out a basic cost benefit analysis of the proposed improvement work but justifying the costs involved was always going to present a challenge. There was a lot of local comment through the Rowlands Castle Parish Council – seeking to correct errors in the report combining with a general enthusiasm amongst residents that the extent and magnitude of the flooding difficulties was finally being recognised.

The Government announced a general response to this and similar national reports in March 2004 when the decision was made that the entire lavant water course be re-designated as a “Main River”. This gave both the Environment Agency and local authorities permissive powers to carry out maintenance and improvement works to prevent impediments to the water course channels.

The flooding prompted a much tighter oversight of ditch maintenance work in the Rowlands Castle Parish managed by a committee appointed by the Parish Council which retains the role to the present day.

However, no further progress has been made on any of the infrastructure recommendations. The report remains in draft and to this day, the Environment Agency has not commented formally on its contents.

On the other hand, there has been much closer engagement between the local Flood Action Group and District/County Councils together with the Environment Agency and utility companies which has made the task of annual maintenance and protecting communities from the effects of flooding that bit easier.

Lavants 2001 – 2016

The lavants next rose in January 2003 but not to the same extent as two years earlier thanks in part to better maintenance and preparation. Rainfall had again been heavy through the autumn with 550mm falling in Finchdean between October 2002 and January 2003.

A few quieter years then passed with lower rainfall levels until February 2007 when the Idsworth lavant next flowed following a very wet preceding autumn. However, the impact of that year's flooding was limited.

Higher rainfall in the 2009 autumn – 500mm in Finchdean between October and December 2009 saw the Idsworth lavant rise in January 2010 with flow continuing through the wet winter months. The ground water levels only receded at the end of April.

Both Chalton and Idsworth lavants flowed in December 2012 and continued intermittently until February 2013.

The most dramatic recent lavant rise occurred in early January 2014 – when the water table rose sharply in response to winter storms immediately prior to Christmas. Heavy rainfall continued into January and February (231mm & 153mm respectively in Finchdean). These combined to produce a very fast flow in both idsworth and Chalton lavants but with better ditch maintenance, no serious incidents of internal flooding to property were brought to the attention of the Flood Action Group.

The Idsworth lavant flowed to a very limited extent in the 2014/15 winter, rising in the north beyond St Huberts Church, but flow was insufficient to reach Dean Lane End.

The Flood Action Group continued to ensure that the most important structures on the water course were maintained in the best possible condition. Thanks to a grant from Scottish and Southern Electricity's Resilient Communities Fund, the 60 metre long Victorian culvert in Rowlands Castle's Sling was dredged through its entire length in September 2015, a job that took the contractor 3 weeks to complete. It was estimated that capacity was increased by around a third as a result of this work and further maintenance was carried out to the ditch draining water into the lavant from Finchdean Road opposite the Castle pub.

The impact of this clearance was seen in January 2016 when the Idsworth lavant again rose and flowed very quickly through its entire length. In spite of significant water volumes, no flooding was seen on Finchdean Road adjacent to the Sling, so it is to be hoped that this maintenance work if repeated on a regular basis will ease problems in one part of the Parish.

Which brings us to the present day (January 2017). What have we learnt from recent years?

- The effects of climate change will inevitably bring more frequent periods of very heavy and sustained rainfall. Gone are the days when we can with confidence talk of “a one in a fifty year flooding occurrence”
- The monitoring of ground water levels by the Environment Agency is far more sophisticated with local well measurements in Chalton, Finchdean and Havant now updated daily on the internet (www.gaugemap.co.uk). The alert system for impending ground water flooding is well established through the local Flood Action Group enabling local property owners to take appropriate action in good time ahead of any possible flooding. The well levels in Chalton and Finchdean provide very close guides as to the likely timing when the Idsworth and Chalton lavants will rise.
- The Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group knows how important it is to work closely and cooperatively with both local flood wardens (appointed to liaise with residents in their area) and riparian landowners who have responsibility for clearing and maintaining the water course where it passes through their land. These landowners include public bodies – Network Rail and local authorities.
- Culverts and key pieces of infrastructure require frequent checking to ensure that they remain in a good state of repair.
- Public body budgets have to allow for the costs of completing this work on an annual basis. Economies will prove illusory.

Communities through which the lavants flow remain vulnerable to the excesses of nature. The capacity of the water system has not been enlarged despite recommendations made as long ago as 2000/1, so in an age of budget austerity it remains incumbent on all local people to work hard to ensure the best possible maintenance of the lavant water course, work that would have been all too familiar to previous generations!

Rowlands Castle Flood Action Group Prepares for Winter

Andy Lee – December 2016

We've enjoyed some glorious weather this autumn. The mix of sunshine and rain produced ideal growing weather so our attention turned at our most recent meeting to the annual task of ensuring that the water course is clear in case the lavant's flow again this winter.

Last year, we saw the benefits of the culvert clearance in the Sling, work that was financed by a Community Resilience Grant from SSE (Scottish & Southern Electricity). Whilst the Chalton lavant didn't rise, much to the relief of Finchdean residents, the flow from the Idsworth lavant was fast and full. There was no flooding in Finchdean Road following the clearance of drainage channels in the Sling, so we hope this augurs well.

We enjoy excellent working relationships with the public bodies on which we rely. East Hampshire District Council, Hampshire District Council, the Environment Agency and SSE are regular attendees at our Group meetings and help us ensure we are as well prepared for the winter as we can be.

Our aim is to work collaboratively with landowners who are responsible for ensuring that ditches are cleared of vegetation that might impede the water flow. This is the crucial time of year for this important work. It involves a lot of planning and discussion as the lavant course passes through many different properties including land owned by public bodies such as Network Rail and local Councils (both Hampshire and West Sussex). We're especially grateful to the West Sussex County Council volunteer team who helped clear the ditch at Dean Lane End in September.

We are also working with BT and West Sussex Highways to tackle a problem at Dean Lane End. The BT pipe carrying cable is below the level of the water course when in full flow meaning that debris snags on the pipe slowing the flow. This then has to be cleared by public spirited volunteers – work that is not without risk.

Two other matters: should any resident be finding it difficult to obtain insurance because of flooding related issues, do consider Flood Re – their website is www.floodre.co.uk. This company has been set up to help householders in a flood risk area find affordable insurance.

Also, we have a number of people in the Parish who have volunteered their time and energies should we need help. Do let me know if you'd like to volunteer as well!



STANSTED PARK FOUNDATION

STANSTED PARK, ROWLANDS CASTLE, HAMPSHIRE, PO9 6DX

CLEARANCE WORK OF THE CULVERTS UNDER THE OLD CARRIAGE DRIVE

The wonderfully constructed trio of culverts under the old carriage drive in Stansted Park were designed to keep this park road free of flood water on the occasions when the Lavant systems rose during wet years. In recent times, with possibly more regular winter flood water than before and much more infrastructure upstream to stop waters from naturally dispersing, the risk of flooding in many local properties has increased. The local Flood Action Group has been instrumental in getting much work carried out in recent years to alleviate these problems.

One of the last major projects has been the clearance of many years of accumulate silt and debris from these three culverts and so with a collaborative effort between the Flood Action Group, the Stansted Park Foundation and Southern Electric Power Distribution, this piece in the local flood alleviation jigsaw is being carried out by the selected contractor C P Kinth, a specialist in this type of operation.

These works have been made possible after receiving funding from Southern Electric Power Distribution's Resilient Communities Fund. This fund is designed to help towns and villages be better prepared for emergency situation and extreme weather events. For more details visit: www.ssepd.co.uk/resiliencefund

Michael Prior,
Head Forester

September 2015



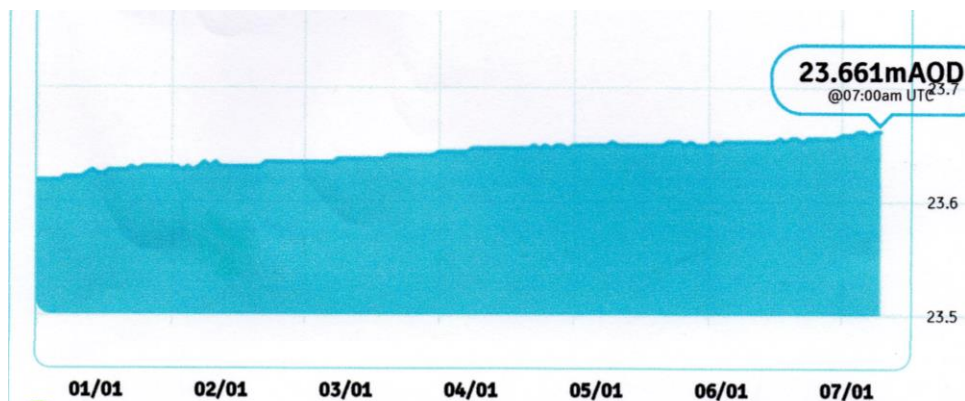


Rowlands Castle Sling culvert clearance in September 2015



Photograph taken from the centre of Finchdean looking up the Chalton Lane (sometimes known as South Lane) in January 2014.

The well in the garden of Carpenters, Finchdean



The groundwater level recorded on the gauge on 7 January 2017 at 07.00am UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) was 23.661mAOD.

The well in the garden of Carpenters, Finchdean, is now used by the Environment Agency as a monitoring guide to assess ground water levels – and with them the likelihood of the winter lavant rising in Idsworth – and then flowing down towards Havant. To see the current level at Google:

<http://www.gaugemap.co.uk/#!Detail/16356/12071>.

The level is measured in metres Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). Ground level is approximately 42 metres AOD so the well depth is the difference between 42 metres and the current reading. The well is approximately 20.4 metres deep (c22.4 metres AOD). The Idsworth lavant can be expected to rise at a reading of between 40 metres and 42 metres AOD.

The Chalton well measurement can be seen at:

<http://www.gaugemap.co.uk/-!Map/Summary/9142/4520>.

The Chalton lavant would generally rise at a reading of 65 metres AOD.



Andy Lee at the well in the garden of his home, Carpenters, Finchdean, and the monitoring equipment. 8 January 2017.



**HAMPSHIRE
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RESCUE
SERVICE**

With thanks to the crews of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service for their sterling efforts during the flooding of Finchdean and Rowlands Castle in 1994.

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